NOT TO BE TAKEN
FROM THE LIBRARY.

PhD
1916
g

378.741
F6
1916 Ph.D

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2013

http://archive.org/details/moralcodeofchiva00gilc

Approved
June 3. 1916
E. Charlton Black.
Dallas Lore Sharp

THE MORAL CODE OF CHIVALRY AS REFLECTED IN MALORY'S MORTE DARTHUR

By

Olive Bacon Gilchrist

(A.B., Boston, 1898; A.M., Boston, 1900)

A Dissertation

submitted in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the

degree of Doctor of Philosophy

GRADUATE SCHOOL

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

1916

Chivalry
"
Morte d'Arthur

Ph D
1916
8

CHAPTER I.

Introduction: William Caxton and Sir Thomas Malory.

"For as much as in the writing of the same (the Tales of Troy,) my pen is worn, my hand weary and not steadfast, mine eyes dimmed with over much looking on the white paper, and my courage not so prone and ready to labor as it hath been, and that age creepeth on me daily and feebleth all the body, and also because I have promised to divers gentlemen and to my friends to address to them as hastily as I might the said book, therefore I have practised and learned at my great charge and dispense to ordain this said book in print after the manner and form as ye may see, and is not written with pen and ink as other books be, to the end that every man may have them at once, for all the books of this story here emprynted as ye see were begun in one day and also finished in one day."

(Caxton: Preface to the Tales of Troy.)

The fifteenth century was for Northern Europe a century of transition. Italy had already shaken off the heavy sleep of the Dark Ages, and was palpitating with an intensity of life which was destined to mark a new era in the world's history. Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio had lived and died before the dawn of this century; Leonardo, in his prime, lent to it the luster of his superb genius; Michelangelo and Raphael, in the first flush of early manhood, were its splen-

did bequest to the century to come. But it was otherwise in the North. Here the lethargy of mediaevalism, the brutality of feudalism, still held unbroken sway. There were, indeed, stirrings that betokened the future awakening, but blood ran more sluggishly under colder skies, and the rising sun of a better day shone, as yet, but feebly through the mists of ignorance and superstition.

The fourteenth century is marked, in the history of English literature, by one or two names so distinguished as to suggest no mean degree of enlightenment in the age which produced them. Such names as Wyclif and Chaucer may easily prove misleading to the superficial student. That these men found among their contemporaries some degree of encouragement and appreciation, is unquestionably true. How small was the circle which their appeal could reach, is not so readily understood. "By slow and toilsome process books were multi-
p. 372 plied (says Rev. James White, in The Eighteen Christian Centuries), carefully copied in legible hand, and then chained up, like inestimable jewels, in monastery or palace, as too valuable to be left at large. A king's library was talked of as a wonder when it contained six or seven hundred volumes. - - - Not one man in five hundred could read, if the book had been written in the plainest text; and at length the running hand was so indistinct as to be not much plainer than hieroglyphics."

As a matter of fact, the literary attainments of a very few produce a brilliant veneer, which serves to conceal only more effectually the prevailing lack of education and refine-

ment in the England of this period. Ten Brink says: „Wohl hat es nie einen englischen Dichter gegeben, der seiner Zeit so weit vorausgeeilt, dessen Verlust für die Poesie daher so schlechthin unersetzlich war, wie Chaucer;" and Pancoast testifies that "the century following the death of Chaucer is generally regarded as 'the most barren' in the history of the literature". This is a serious indictment, and one which we may easily force beyond its legitimate implications. One thing, however, is certain. There is a disappointing discrepancy between the intrinsic greatness of Chaucer's own work and the uninspired mediocrity of that of his disciples. Though his influence was powerful within narrow limits, there is nothing to indicate that its stimulus was felt by the rank and file of the nation. This would have been, in the nature of the case, impossible. He left, at his death, an ardent circle of admirers and imitators, who rallied, with the best of intentions, about the standard which he had set up. But circumstances were against them. They wrestled with a rapidly changing language; they sang to a limited and uncritical public; they lacked the potent genius of their master. They had, in short, undertaken a task which they could not perform, and to the great mass of the English people it was as though Chaucer had never been.

Geschichte der Englischen Litteratur II - 217

An Introduction to English Literature, 99

In the realm of creative literature, the England of the fifteenth century has then little whereof to boast. But this undeniable fact must not be supposed to imply stagnation. The leaven of a new intellectual life was working slowly, but surely, in those days so barren of literary productivity; and

the end was little short of revolution.

"In the fifteenth century (says Pancoast) England passed definitely out of the bounds of the Middle Ages and came to share as a nation in the inspiration of the Renaissance, which, in the century before, only such rare individual minds as Chaucer and Wyclif had known by anticipation." Among the agencies which brought about this signal achievement, few, if any, played a larger part than the printing-press.

The art of printing had flourished on the continent of Europe for more than twenty years, before it was introduced into England. It was in 1476 that William Caxton set up, at the sign of the Red Pale, in the almonry of Westminster, the first printing-press in Great Britain.

Caxton was born about 1422, of a Kentish family of apparently good standing and comfortable circumstances. He was apprenticed in 1438 to one Robert Large, a prosperous London merchant, and passed three years under his tutelage. But the untimely death of Large in 1441 cut short the apprenticeship of young Caxton, and he soon after left England for Belgium. Bruges was at this time the center of the flourishing Anglo-Flemish trade, and as such was the seat of an English colony of considerable proportions. Here Caxton entered upon a business venture of his own, and rose, with the passing years, to both wealth and distinction. In 1463 we find him at the head of the "Merchant Adventurers of the Low Countries", a gild, known also as the "English Nation", which enjoyed special privileges under grants from the Dukes of Burgundy. A conspicuously successful busi-

ness man, the first Englishman in Bruges, Caxton had apparently reached the crowning point of his career. As a matter of fact he had not yet found his life work.

For upwards of a quarter of a century Caxton had devoted his first thought and energy to mercantile pursuits. But his interest was by no means confined to the market. The Bruges of the fifteenth century was not merely the great emporium of Northern Europe; as the seat of the Dukes of Burgundy it enjoyed their generous patronage of the arts, and its libraries were world-famous. There was keen intellectual stimulus in the very air, and Caxton was endowed with tastes and talents which could not fail to respond to it. Yet he was nearly fifty years old, before he gave to the world any tangible evidence of literary activity.

He did, at length, undertake to translate into English a famous French book entitled Le Receuil des Histoires de Troyes. But the English language at that time was in a state of transition, and he found the work peculiarly difficult. He was harassed by the counter demands of pedantry and simplicity; he was perplexed by the rapidly changing meaning of words and phrases; he was at a loss to choose among conflicting dialects. He confesses that he gave it up: "After that I had made and written a five or six quires, I fell in despair of this work, and purposed never to have continued therein, and the quires laid apart, and in two years after labored no more in this work."

Greene's Short History of the English People

I - 378

About this time Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, wedded Margaret of York, sister to the English king. In

virtue of his position as leader of the "English Nation", Caxton naturally came into close contact with the young duchess, when she took up her residence in Bruges. She was not slow to appreciate his superior worth and attainments, and in a comparatively short time, had persuaded him to resign his office in the gild and become a member of her household. This proved to be the turning point in Caxton's life.

At the special request of the Duchess Margaret, he now undertook to complete that translation which he had once abandoned as hopeless, and in 1471 the finished work was presented to his patroness. She received it with enthusiasm, and her favor rendered it so popular that the demand for copies soon exceeded all possibility of supply. In these straits his thought turned to the new art of printing, recently introduced into Bruges by Colard Mansion.

Caxton's disciple, Wynkyn de Worde, asserts that Caxton himself learned the art of printing in Cologne in 1471. His biographer, Blades, is inclined to question this statement. It was, at all events, to Mansion that he turned for relief in the publication of The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye, and it is by no means improbable that he mastered the technique of the art through actual collaboration with Mansion in this work. Thus was produced the first book printed in the English language.

From this time on, Caxton was fired by a new ambition. He hasarded a second translation, The Game and Playe of Chesse, from a French version of the Liber de ludo scacchorum,

publishing it, like the first, in Bruges. It met with instant success, and the entire edition was soon exhausted.

Having now proved that the printing of English books could be made profitable even in a foreign land, Caxton determined to return to England and set up a press of his own. This he did, as above stated, in 1476. One year later appeared the first dated book printed in England, Lord Rivers's translation of the Dictes or Sayengis of the philosophres, revised by Caxton. In the fifteen years of life which yet remained to this pioneer printer, he accomplished an almost incredible amount of work. Though he apparently had little skilled assistance in his printing establishment, he succeeded in publishing no less than ninety-six different works or editions of works, and not a few of them were his own translations from French originals. The greater part of this remarkable output has long since been forgotten by all save a few antiquarians. Our present concern is with a single one of Caxton's publications, of which Prof. John Matthews Manley speaks as follows:

Ency. Brit. IX - 615

"The only book of permanent interest as literature which he introduced to the world was the Morte Darthur of Sir Thomas Malory, and this is a compilation from older romances. It is, to be sure, the one book of permanent literary significance produced in England in the 15th century; it glows with the warmth and beauty of the old knight's conception of chivalry and his love for the great deeds and great men of the visionary past, and it continually allures the reader by its fresh and vivid diction, and by a syntax which, though sometimes

faulty, has almost always a certain naïve charm; 'thystorye (i.e. the history) of the sayd Arthur', as Caxton long ago declared, 'is so gloryous and shynyng, that he is stalled in the first place of the moost noble, beste and worthyest of the Crysten men'; it is not, however, as the first of a new species, but as the final flower of an old that this glorious and shining book retains its place in English literature."

The credit for the preservation of the Morte Darthur belongs solely to Caxton and his printing press. Without them it would have had small chance of surviving to the twentieth century. As it is, the personality of its author, or compiler, has faded so completely into the mists of the past, that little is left but a name. His very identity seemed hopelessly lost when, at a gathering held at Columbia College in 1894, Prof. George Lyman Kittredge of Harvard University advanced a new theory regarding it. About two years later, Mr. T. W. Williams suggested that the author might be one "Thomas Malorie miles", whom he found mentioned in a document of the eighth year of Edward IV, but of whom he knew nothing more. Thereupon Prof. Kittredge published in the Harvard Studies and Notes a monograph entitled Who Was Sir Thomas Malory? He believed that he knew, and so convincingly did he state his case that he succeeded in winning others to his faith. His view has since received general acceptance among scholars interested in the question. At the present time it holds the field, practically undisputed, and upon any sceptic who doubts its validity lies the burden of refuting its logic.

Athenaeum No. 3585

Vol. V 1896

The colophon to the Morte Darthur says specifically that "this book was ended the ninth year of the reign of King Edward

the Fourth, by Sir Thomas Malcore (also spelled Malory), Knight. Any claimant to the honor of its authorship must therefore be a Thomas Malory who fulfills certain conditions, stated by Prof. Kittredge as follows:

"(1) He must have been a knight; (2) he must have been alive in the ninth year of Edward IV, which extended from March 4, 1469 to March 3, 1470 (both inclusive); (3) he must have been old enough in 9 Ed. IV to make it possible that he should have written this work. Further Caxton does not say that he received the 'copy' directly from the author, and his language may ne held to indicate that Malory was dead when the book was printed. In this case he must have died before the last day of July (or June), 1485, and we have a fourth condition to be complied with."

Monograph 86-87

All these conditions are satisfied by Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revell (or Fenny Revell), M. P. for Warwickshire in 1445.

"(1) He was a knight.

(2) He died March 14, 1470 (10 Ed. IV).

(3) He was not under 57 years of age, and may have been 70 or more at the time of his death.

(4) He died some years before the Morte Darthur was published."

The date of this man's birth is not known exactly, but he succeeded his father, Sir John Malory, in 1433 or '34. He had previously served in the retinue of the Earl of Warwick in France, probably while the latter was captain of Calais. It seems also probable that he is to be identified with that "Thomas Malorie miles", who, on account of the part played by

him in the Wars of the Roses, was in 1468 excluded, with certain others, from the operation of a pardon issued by Edward IV. Upon the death of Sir Thomas Malory M. P. there was, however, no difficulty regarding inheritance, his grandson being allowed to succeed to his estates unchallenged. He must therefore, if this identification be correct, have come under the conditions of the general amnesty of 1469, and there is nothing to render this improbable.

Prof. Kittredge finds further indirect corroboration of his theory in the circumstances of the life of this Sir Thomas Malory. From our meager knowledge of him, we may safely draw the conclusion that he was of gentle birth and high breeding. "It is not to be doubted, then, that Sir Thomas received a gentleman's education according to the ideas of the fifteenth century, which are not to be confounded with those of an earlier illiterate period. That he should learn to read and write French, as well as to speak it, was a matter of course." More than this, his experiences in France were calculated to arouse the keenest interest in such heroic romance as that of the Morte Darthur. The young Earl of Warwick was himself so brilliant a knight that posterity has woven marvellous tales about his name. His sobriquet of "the King-Maker" is suggestive of that mingling of audacity, pride and power, which is irresistible to the youth of all generations. He was, indeed, the very pattern of chivalry and it need excite no wonder, if in association with him, Malory fell under the spell of a fascination that followed him through life.

Monograph p. 88

If the compiler of the Morte Darthur is to be identified

with "Thomas Malorie miles", the case of Prof. Kittredge is still further strengthened. A highly educated gentleman who found himself out of favor at court and hence, to a greater or lesser extent, ostracized, might most naturally seek occupation in the realm of books. The preparation of the Morte Darthur involved a vast expenditure of time in working over older romances and in selecting, translating, and recombining the elements which were to enter into this most comprehensive version of the Arthurian legend. It was, clearly, a task for a man of ample leisure, and one well calculated to hold harassing thoughts at bay. In other words, the demands of the work and the situation of "Thomas Malorie miles" fit each other to perfection.

Preface to Everyman Edition of Morte Darthur by John Rhys

Prof. Kittredge devotes some space to a refutation of the only other theory of Malory's identity which could reasonably claim standing as a rival of his own. Prof. Rhys has advanced the idea that Malory was a Welshman, but he bases his assumption largely on what Prof. Kittredge declares to be a false etymology, and his theory, at best, would fix only the nationality of the romancer. He makes no attempt at individual identification. He calls attention to the fact that the name Malory occurs in Yorkshire in the sixteenth century, and in Leicestershire in the seventeenth; but it seems to have escaped him altogether that the name, in one form or another, is common in Warwickshire at a much earlier period. By a lengthy enumeration of items from ancient records, as well as by etymological arguments, Prof. Kittredge shows the fallacy of Prof. Rhys's contention.

We may then assume that the Morte Darthur is the work of a fifteenth century Englishman, preserved to our own day through the mediation of the first English printer. We have already seen that the coming of the printing-press marked the passing of an era, and that the Morte Darthur is of peculiar interest as the last of the great mediaeval romances. Its unique position as such is, however, revealed only by the perspective of the centuries. To Caxton it could appeal solely upon the ground of intrinsic merit of one sort or another. His own preface reflects, in a curious way, the conflict which marked the transition from the old age of credulity and superstition to the new age of scepticism and reason. But this antithesis appears purely as a by-product of his thought. The real significance of the Morte Darthur was to him quite independent of any antiquarian interest which it might possess. What then did this book signify to Caxton? What does it signify to-day?

CHAPTER II

The Morte Darthur.

"'But thee,
When first thou camest - such a courtesy
Spake thro' the limbs and in the voice - I knew
For one of those who eat in Arthur's hall;
For good ye are and bad, and like to coins,
Some true, some light, but every one of you
Stamp'd with the image of the King.'"

(Tennyson: The Holy Grail 21 - 27.)

It was on the last day of July, in the year 1485, that there issued from Caxton's press the "noble and joyous book entitled Le Morte Darthur". This was the famous printer's own description of his fifty-second publication. Among the fifty-one titles already in his catalogue there was the greatest diversity of subject. It had always been his policy to stimulate the appetite of his readers by a varied literary diet. History and legend, theology and philosophy, poetry and romance, he had given to the world in rapid succession. As a man of letters, he was inspired by an honest ambition to put the best literature within reach of the multitudes; as a man of business, he appreciated the importance of giving due heed to the tastes of the reading public. The time had come when there was an insistent call for a particular book. "Many noble and divers gentlemen of this realm of England (he says) came and demanded me, many and ofttimes, wherefore that I had not do made and imprinted the noble

Preface to the Morte Darthur

histor, of the Sangreal, and of the most renowned Christian king, first and foremost of the three best Christian and worthy, King Arthur." The answer to this question he sets forth somewhat at length in his preface to the Morte Darthur.

reface to
e Morte
Darthur

It appears that Caxton was a sceptic regarding the great hero. He was aware that "divers men hold opinion that there was no such Arthur, and that all such books as he made of him be but feigned and fables"; and he was strongly inclined to agree with them. It is interesting to note, however, that some hidden scruple or sentiment had thus far forbidden him to relegate Arthur entirely to the realm of myth. Else why had he hesitated to publish his story as pure fiction? Other romances had passed through his press, some of which, as we know, he had himself translated from the French. In the tales of the Round Table, as offered by Malory, he had ready to hand a romance absorbing in interest, and of almost certain appeal to English readers, because so largely indigenous to the soil. Of its literary merit, moreover, there could be no question. Why then did he require outside pressure to induce him to accept so promising a manuscript? Apparently because these marvellous tales were disposed to masquerade in the guise of authentic history, and both conscience and common sense forbade him to stand sponsor for them in any such pretences. Yet so strong were the arguments presented to him that he "could not well deny but that there was such a noble king named Arthur". He determined, in the end, upon a sort of compromise. He would yield to the popular demand to the extent of publishing the Morte Darthur, but he would assume

no personal responsibility for its truth. By making his own position clear at the outset, he would throw upon the reader the burden of belief or disbelief. "And for to pass the time this book shall be pleasant to read in; but for to give faith and believe that all is true that is contained herein, ye be at your liberty."

Preface to the Morte Darthur

Thus it is plain that Malory's work suffered under a serious handicap from the beginning, if it was ever intended to pass for genuine history. Its first publisher refused to foist it as such on a possibly too credulous public. The real value of this work Caxton conceived to be of a totally different character. He appreciated it as a delightful story-book, full of "joyous and pleasant histories, and noble and renowned acts of humanity, gentleness and chivalries". He could not fail to be impressed by the rhythmic flow of its stately style. But he saw in it something deeper than romance or style. Whether true to fact or not, it was true to life; and as a mirror of human experience it was fraught with great educational possibilities. Its ethical quality was perhaps paramount in his mind. "For herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue, and sin. Do after the good and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame and renown." This is his reiterated exhortation as he sends the book forth into the world.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Subsequent history has fully justified Caxton's estimate of the Morte Darthur. Though its version of the old heroic tales is a late, and ofttimes distorted one, it has gradually

displaced all rivals in the popular esteem. More than that, it has proved itself a spring of inspiration and power to successive generations of English poets. Spenser, Dryden and Wordsworth, Bulwer, Tennyson and Swinburne have all felt the spell of the Arthurian tales, and many minor poets have added their tribute to the great king. One after another has handled his material in an imaginative, rather than a literal, way, and the old stories have thus undergone many a greater or lesser modification. Yet so deep is the impress of Malory's work on the mind and consciousness of the English people, that Maynadier finds but one change since its publication "which seems likely to be permanent", viz. Tennyson's account of the first meeting of Lancelot and Guinevere. (cf. The Coming of Arthur, 446-474.)

Whence comes this remarkable vitality? The Morte Darthur stands to-day as the one literary monument of a well-nigh forgotten age. With the possible exception of the Travels of Sir John Mandeville, it is the oldest prose work in the English language which enjoys any degree of present popularity. This is not to be explained on the ground of its containing the history of England's first great king. It is safe to say that no single human being has for centuries regarded it seriously in that light. Its romantic interest, however intense, is equally inadequate to account for its enduring fame. Malory laid no claim to originality. He professed to be a mere translator - at most an editor - of old tales which he had found in French. As a matter of fact most of them had already been told in English - and forgotten. Distinction of

style has doubtless contributed, in no small measure, to the long and honorable life of the Morte Darthur. But style is, at best, a matter of form and sheen and color. It may dazzle for the moment, but time inevitably reveals its hollowness, if it lack the animating spirit of a worthy content. We have seen that Caxton laid special emphasis on two aspects of his publication - the romantic or chivalric, and the moral or spiritual; and the latter he conceived as the soul of the former. Errant knights and noble ladies, sacred quests and festive tournaments were indeed fascinating; but Malory had contrived to imbue the whole pageant with a mystic spiritual significance. This spiritual quality it was which gave his work its supreme meaning in the beginning; this it is which constitutes its hold on successive generations of men.

The Arthur of the English Poets 277

Maynadier has summed up in a single sentence the peculiar rôle of the Arthurian cycle in modern English literature. "Dangerous as it is to emphasise moral teaching in works of art, for it is so easy to exaggerate the moral, still, the history of Arthurian romances since the Renaissance will show that it is successful attempts to give them new moral meaning which have made alive the most famous Arthurian stories of later times." This being the case, it follows, as a matter of course, that there has been a constant tendency both to idealize the character, and to spiritualize the deeds, of the Round Table knights. It may, however, be noted in passing that there are a few curious exceptions to this rule. The case of Gawaine is notorious. Having begun his career as the peerless and stainless knight of the early romancers, he has

ancelot
d Elaine
53-881

run a steadily descending course until, in Tennyson, he appears as "Gawain, surnamed the Courteous", but "with smiling face and frowning heart".

The prevailing tendency toward the ideal is strikingly illustrated in the following lines, which Tennyson puts into the mouth of Arthur, in his last interview with Guinevere:

Guinevere
457-474 &
481

"But I was first of all the kings who drew
The knighthood-errant of this realm and all
The realms together under me, their Head,
In that fair Order of my Table Round,
A glorious company, the flower of men,
To serve as model for the mighty world,
And be the fair beginning of a time.
I made them lay their hands in mine and swear
To reverence the King, as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honor his own word as if his God's,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her; - - - - - - - - - -
And all this throve before I wedded thee."

The inspiration for his beautiful "Idylls" we know that Tennyson found in Malory. But where did he find this saintly band of knights? Certainly not in Malory! Even Merlin's terser and more conservative eulogy of his "friends of old - all brave, and many generous, and some chaste" - seems, in face of the facts, to verge on the extravagant. For were not Galahad and Percivale the only "maiden knights" of all the Table Round?

Merlin and
Vivien
814-815

The casual reader of the Morte Darthur is alternately thrilled by the nobility, and shocked by the grossness, of its heroes. At times he marvels that these superb fellows have found so small a place in modern life and thought. He

would that they might become the boon companions of every growing boy. Anon he recoils in horror at the sheer brutality and lust of the whole knightly fellowship. He is forced to confess that every seat at the Round Table is but a siege perilous at best. The wonder is that there was one Galahad, or one Percivale, not that there were not more. Caxton himself saw this quite clearly. He found much that
Preface was admirable: "chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship." But over against these his preface places "cowardice, murder, hate"; over against virtue, sin. His trust was in the discriminating conscience of the reading public. Believing, apparently, like
Guinevere 655 Tennyson's Guinevere that "we needs must love the highest when we see it," he was satisfied that the net influence of the book would be an elevating one. Such has indeed been the fact. Perhaps no other book, except the English Bible, has inspired so much that is high and fine in English literature. It would seem then, that a study of the moral code, the fundamental ideals of the Morte Darthur, should prove not unprofitable.

Such a study we propose to undertake. But our task is by no means so simple as it might appear. Certain fundamental difficulties are encountered at the outset. It requires but a superficial reading of the book to reveal glaring inconsistencies in the text. Careful rereading serves only to prove the more conclusively that such inconsistencies are neither rare nor unimportant. They are so deep and so vital as to constitute a serious problem. For the sake of convenience they may be roughly divided into two classes: (1) Inconsis-

tencies of fact, and (2) Incongruities of character. To follow out this subject in detail would involve no small labor. A few instances taken at random will, however, serve the purpose of illustration.

Confusion of fact is nowhere more patent than in the story of Sir Galahad. At the close of Book XVII Galahad
- 268-'9 takes a touching farewell of Sir Bors and Sir Percivale, commits to Sir Bors a parting message to Sir Launcelot, then dies and is buried in the "holy city" of which he has been
II - 271 made king. Book XVIII opens with the rejoicings in Camelot over the return of such knights as were "left on live" "after the quest of the Sangreal was fulfilled." Yet in this very book Galahad appears in the tourney at Winchester quite as though nothing had happened. More than that, he, the peerless, the invincible, has degenerated into a very ordinary
II - 287 knight, whose party is declared to be "passing weak to hold against King Arthur's." In Book XIX he still lives and is restored to something of his former glory. Yet though peer-
II - 334 less "in holy deeds" he is not "the best knight of the world." It is Launcelot who proves his right to that title by healing
II - 337 the wounds of the bewitched Sir Urre. In the case of Sir
Cf. II - 1-64 - 69- 12 - 334 Lamorak de Galis there is a similar discrepancy of fact. Though repeated reference has been made to his death at the hands of Sir Gawaine and his brothers, he figures in Book XIX as one of the one hundred and ten knights who attempted to bring relief to this same Sir Urre.

Incongruity of character is admirably illustrated in Gawaine. His gradual descent from the place of highest honor

to the place of deepest shame has already been mentioned. This process was well under way in Malory's time and we find consequently, in his work, a quite impossible Gawaine. He and his brothers are "called the greatest destroyers and murderers
II - 64 of good knights that be now in this realm"; one hermit rebukes
II - 166 him for having "used the most untruest life that ever I heard knight live"; and another declares to him: "It is long time
II - 219 past sith that ye were made knight, and never sithen thou servedst thy Maker, and now thou art so old a tree that in thee is neither life nor fruit." Yet it is this same Ga-
II - 392 waine whom Launcelot praises as "a full noble knight as ever
II - 382 was born", and whom Arthur mourns as "the man in the world that I loved most".

The character of Arthur himself will not bear close scrutiny. Though he is head and center of the whole knightly
II - 97 fellowship, and though Tristram declares that "all knights may learn to be a knight of him", he more than once does violence to the simplest rudiments of the knightly code of honor. Fair play lies at the foundation of all true chivalry, yet he
II - 310 does not hesitate to set nine knights against two. He charges
I - 89 his knights "never to do outrageousity nor murder"; but he
I - 37 himself, in a panic over Merlin's prophecy of the evil to be
I - 45 wrought by his own son, "let send for all the children born on May-day, begotten of lords and born of ladies", and "all were put in a ship to the sea". It was a slaughter of the innocents as wanton and as brutal as Herod's. The knights of
I - 90 the Round Table were pledged "always to do ladies, damosels and gentlewomen succour, upon pain of death". But their king

I - 14-15 -353 regarded them and their glorious deeds above the honor of either his sister or his wife. He was, in short, a sadly imperfect hero, whether judged by the standards of his own day or of ours.

The reason for the flagrant inconsistencies of the Morte Darthur is not far to seek. Malory used more than one "French book" in collecting his material for this noblest of English romances. Into it he wove tales that had been taking shape for centuries before they came to his hands. Bard after bard, romancer after romancer had modified the old stories to suit his individual purpose. One after another had left his own peculiar impress on the character of the heroes. And Malory himself gave free rein to his imagination as he worked them over once more. He appropriated what seemed to him good wherever he found it, he added or subtracted at the dictates of his own fancy, and in the end he molded the whole conglomerate into something like a continuous narrative. But in doing so, he made little or no attempt to reconcile the often contradictory elements which he had brought together from various sources. The result is a work surpassing in literary excellence, absorbing in interest, but abounding also in discrepancies of every conceivable kind. The Galahad who died so gloriously in the - 268-'9 holy city of Sarras, is not the same Galahad who appears I - 287 shortly after, as a mediocre knight, in the tournament at Winchester. We have here plainly a confusion of two distinct stories, or, at the least, of two widely varying versions of the same story, as modified by different story-tellers. The I - 97 same is doubtless true of the Arthur who was all nobility and

I - 45
II - 14-15
353

piety, and the Arthur who was cruel, passionate, and lax in his moral conceptions. We believe that this is the only adequate explanation of Malory's hopeless inconsistency.

We must then recognize that the Morte Darthur is altogether lacking in the unity of the well-built modern novel; that its material is distinctly heterogeneous, its construction extremely loose. Granting this, we are confronted by the question whether there be any basic code of honor which is valid for the work as a whole. Again, we are haunted by a doubt whether such a code, if existent and discoverable, could possess any practical significance for the twentieth century. Yet this book is to-day, as it was more than four hundred years ago, an active power for good, an abiding inspiration to high endeavor. This extraordinary ethical vitality is an indisputable fact; and this it is which encourages us to hold to our original purpose.

We have undertaken a study of the fundamental ideals of the Morte Darthur. Malory's theme is chivalry in its prime; our own theme therefore resolves itself into a consideration of the moral code of chivalry as reflected in his work.

CHAPTER III.

The Moral World of Chivalry - Fundamental Conceptions.

"My lord, Sir Launcelot, said Meliagrance, I rede you beware what ye do; for though ye are never so good a knight, as ye wot well ye are renowned the best knight of the world, yet should ye be advised to do battle in a wrong quarrel, for God will have a stroke in every battle."

(Malory: Morte Darthur II - 326.)

Heroes and Hero-Worship 236-'7

Carlyle says: "The thing a man does practically believe - - the thing a man does practically lay to heart, and know for certain, concerning his vital relations to this mysterious Universe, and his duty and destiny there, that is in all cases the primary thing for him, and creatively determines all the rest. That is his religion; or, it may be, his mere scepticism and no-religion: the manner it is in which he feels himself to be spiritually related to the Unseen World or No-World; and I say, if you tell me what that is, you tell me to a very great extent what the man is, what the kind of things he will do is."

What did Malory's knights of the Round Table practically believe concerning the world they lived in? What was their fundamental conception of the "Unseen World or No-World"? They were primarily men of action. Their only science was a science of arms; their philosophy was of the simplest character; their religious creed was a curious compound of tradition and

superstition. Science and philosophy alike were to them but functions of the life of adventure. The first was of a purely practical nature. It had been developed by the every-day needs of the man-at-arms, and without a thorough knowledge of it, he could never hope to achieve distinction in the great tourney of life. The knight's philosophy partook largely both of the practical nature of his science and of the mystical nature of his religion. The metaphysical element, if not altogether lacking, was a matter of instinct rather than of conscious thought. Yet there were certain things which the knight did confidently believe, and these it is our purpose to discover.

We may safely assert, first, that it is distinctly a religion, not a "no-religion", which animates Malory's knights of the Round Table. "God's in his heaven." So much is sure. Apparently not one of them ever doubted it. When, in the beginning the legitimacy of Arthur's claim to the throne was in
I - 10 question, "the Archbishop, by the advice of Merlin" summoned "all the lords and gentlemen of arms" to a great prayer-meeting. "And many of them made them clean of their life, that their prayer might be the more acceptable unto God. So in the greatest church of London - - - all the estates were long or day in the church for to pray." And when, in the end, the last
II - 389 tragic fight was over, Arthur's farewell to his one remaining knight took the form of a request for an interest in his prayers: "For I will into the vale of Avilion to heal me of my grievous wound: and if thou hear never more of me, pray for my soul." Balan once braced his disheartened brother Balin
I - 53 with the words: "Ye must take the adventure that God will

ordain you." And Launcelot gave answer to a timorous expostula-
I - 284 tion from the queen: "I will take the adventure that God will send me."

Belief in an overruling Providence is indeed inherent in the knightly conception of life. The world of chivalry is a world of romance, i. e. a world in which thought and expectation are ever transcending the mere sense experience of the moment. It is a world in which anything may happen at any time. Its denizens are haunted by mysterious influences and powers which lie quite outside the realm of the physical senses. They live constantly on the qui vive for great and strange events, and they accept them at face value when they come. Nothing is discounted merely because it defies analysis or classification. The spirit of romance, eager to accept whatever marvel may offer, is, in short, the antithesis of the modern scientific spirit, which persists in rejecting whatever it cannot prove.

The implications of the romantic spirit are quite as far-reaching as those of the scientific spirit. To the knight who is ever conscious of a world of mystery beyond the world of sight and hearing, belief in God is a matter of course. God is to him the personification of good, as Satan visibly appearing in divers forms, is the personification of evil. Faith in the Higher Powers is the very atmosphere in which he lives and moves and has his being. So sure is he that life is fraught
Cf.
I - 249 with real significance that any remarkable occurrence comes as a challenge to him to fathom its meaning. More than this he feels himself bound to make his own life significant. If duty present itself unsought, well and good. He may neither disre-

gard its summons nor postpone its accomplishment. But if adventure fail to seek him out, knightly honor demands that he ride forth in active quest of it.

Faith lies very close to the root of all knightly virtue. The youth who would win his spurs leaves the parental roof in perfect confidence that opportunity will not fail him. When La Cote Male Taile sought the honor of knighthood at the hands
- 301 of King Arthur, "by sudden adventure there was an horrible lion kept in a strong tower of stone, and it happened that he at that time brake loose, and came hurling afore the queen and her knights". Chance favored the young man yet further in that most of her knights ignominiously fled, and the few remaining were unable to cope with the beast. La Cote Male Taile proved equal
- 301 to the occasion, and "then the king forthwithal made him knight".

But the exercise and the reward of faith were not for the
- 180 young alone. The king himself "had a custom that at the feast of Pentecost in especial, afore other feasts in the year, he would not go that day to meat until he had heard or seen of a great marvel. And for that custom all manner of strange adventures came before Arthur as at that feast before all other feasts." Once, in the fulness of his joy over the return of Launcelot and certain others to his court, he quite forgot this
- 166 custom. But Sir Kay reminded him of it. "So, as they stood speaking, in came a squire and said unto the king: Sir, I bring unto you marvellous tidings." The expected wonder was even then at his gate. With mind and heart set upon lofty achievement these knights were wont to step out on faith; and they found their faith honored in signal degree. Implicit trust in God

was indeed a duty, as well as a privilege. When the supreme
Cf. I - 211 ff. test came in the quest of the Grail, it was "evil faith and poor belief" which spelled failure to more than one of the Table Round.

We may go one step further in defining the religion of Malory's knights. In form it is distinctly Christian. It was at Christmas that the Archbishop summoned "the lords and gentle-
I - 10 men of arms" to prayer, in the hope that "Jesus, that was born on that night - - - as he was come to be king of mankind," might "show some miracle who should be rightways king of this realm". The importance attached to the orthodox faith is curiously shown in the general attitude toward Palomides and other Saracens.
I - 48 The body of one is said to have emitted a foul odor after death. "So was the corpse had away and buried in a wood, by cause he
I - 160 was a paynim." The obduracy of Sir Palomides in refusing to be christened is so incomprehensible to Sir Tristram, that he opens a discussion of the question under the most extraordinary circumstances. Tristram has just been overcome by Palomides, but the two have agreed to postpone mortal combat until such time as they may meet on equal footing. In the armed truce
I - 48 thus established, the Christian learns that the Saracen has sworn to fight "seven true battles for Jesu's sake" before being christened, and that of the seven, only one remains.
I - 161 Though still suffering from the exhaustion of the recent conflict, Tristram proceeds forthwith to borrow armor that he may enable the Saracen to fight that last battle. Whereupon Sir
I - 163 Palomides was christened, and "Sir Tristram and Sir Gallleron were his godfathers".

The distinctively Christian element of the Morte Darthur reaches its climax in the quest of Sangreal, which Malory makes the crowning glory of his Round Table fellowship. Here we find intensified much Christian doctrine that is more or less lightly touched upon in other parts of the work. Here is Christian mysticism carried to its utmost limit. At times indeed the tone becomes almost offensively ecclesiastical. But we must be on our guard lest we be deceived by all this.

In estimating the significance of formal Christianity for the world of chivalry, it is well to hold in mind two facts: (1) That there is no mention of the Round Table itself in the earliest Arthurian romances, and (2) That the Grail is believed by some scholars to have had its origin in Celtic folk-lore, hence to have had, in the beginning, no Christian significance whatever. It is true that we are dealing, at the present time, with the ideals of chivalry as mirrored in Malory, and it follows that any digression from Malory in search of "sources" or "authority" is liable to lead us too far afield. An occasional glance at the historical background of the whole Arthurian cycle may, however, enable us to judge Malory's own work with a fairer sense of proportion. The broader outlook suggests in the present instance an isolation of the Grail motif which proves both practicable and illuminating.

We find indeed that the intensely rarefied spiritual atmosphere of Books XIII to XVII (i. e. the portion dealing with the quest of the Grail) is not characteristic of the Morte Darthur as a whole. The case of Sir Launcelot affords striking illustration of a general discrepancy. Throughout Book XVII,

even to its closing chapters, he has given every indication of being a chastened and a changed man. It is then with a shock of amazement, almost of incredulity, that we read, in the very first chapter of Book XVIII that Launcelot has relapsed into his old sin once more. This is, as a matter of fact, one of the places where the superficial linking of divergent elements is most apparent. The penitent and pious Launcelot is he of the Grail romance which served as source for this part of Malory's work, while the faulty and amorous Launcelot is he of more common tradition, whose soul is held thrall by Geunever. This single instance is enough to prove the danger of drawing general conclusions from any one portion of the Morte Darthur. That dealing with the quest of the Grail is especially misleading, and we therefore set it aside for separate consideration later. Ignoring it for the present, we return to our study of that which is truly fundamental to the knightly conception of life.

There were certain implications of the knight's faith in the Christian God which he accepted almost unconsciously. He felt instinctively that God's world must be a righteous world. The right must prosper, the evil must, in the end, go down to defeat. Sir Bors on one occasion undertook to establish the cause of a sorely wronged gentlewoman. Having learned the name
I - 222 of his adversary-to-be, he told the lady: "Now may ye send - - word that ye have found a knight that shall fight with that Pridam le Noire in God's quarrel and yours." Everywhere the cause of the wronged and the oppressed was recognized as "God's quarrel". And because God was against him, the "false knight"

always fought at a disadvantage. When the young Beaumains en-
I - 205 countered the "red knight of the red laundes", he was quite unabashed by the sight of his adversary's many victims hanging on the trees round about. "Now thou weenest that the sight of these hanged knights should fear me (he says). Nay truly, not so; that shameful sight causeth me to have courage and hardiness against thee, more than I would have had against thee an thou wert a well-ruled knight." And so Tennyson's Galahad boasts:

.r Galahad
Stanza I

"My strength is as the strength of ten
Because my heart is pure."

But there were disquieting exceptions to this rule. Even in the romantic world of chivalry the right did not always prevail. The treacherous King Mark, for example, succeeded in doing a deal of harm to better men than he. "Here am I slain
I - 393 in a righteous quarrel (moans one of his victims); and all was by cause Sir Bersules and I would not consent by treason to slay the noble knight, Sir Tristram." And the maidens to whom he makes his plaint, voice the age-long question of humanity:
I - 393 "O sweet Lord Jesu, that knowest all hid things, why sufferest Thou so false a traitor to vanquish and slay a true knight that fought in a righteous quarrel?" The heavens give back no answer. No real solution of the difficulty has ever been found. But the code of chivalry laid upon every true knight the obligation to avenge wrong. For it would seem that successful vengeance was felt to be, in some way, a vindication of the moral law.

The idea of vengeance was ingrained in the very fibre of the knight's moral being. In this respect his religion was as far removed from the Christian ideal as the east is from the

west. The doctrine that vengeance is for God alone had never really penetrated his moral consciousness, if he had ever heard of it. Once only does the Christian idea find expression, and that in the after-thought of the pious Galahad, who has just done his full share in slaying a band of evil knights. Sir Bors ventures the opinion that "if God had loved them" he would
II - 248 not have allowed their enemies to kill them. "Say ye not so, said Galahad, for if they misdid against God, the vengeance is not ours, but to Him which hath power thereof." But even Galahad's compunctions disappear when he learns that his victims were "not christened"!

As a rule, vengeance constituted one of the most sacred duties of a knight. Not only did he recognize it as such - he directly invoked the help of God for its accomplishment. On the day when Sir Alisander was made knight, he received from his mother's hands the bloody doublet of his father, slain many
II - 29 years before. "Now I require thee (she says) and charge thee upon my blessing, and upon the high order of knighthood, that thou be revenged upon King Mark for the death of thy father." And the youth replies: "Fair mother, ye have given me a great charge, and here I promise you I shall be avenged upon King Mark when that I may; and that I promise to God and to you." The idea of vengeance as a duty seems to have been based upon the instinctive demand that wrong be punished, and the assumption that God's wrath worked itself out through human instrumentality.

That sin and retribution are inseparably linked to one another, is one of the moral axioms of Malory's world.

. von Logau "Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they
etribution grind exceeding small."

The shadow of Arthur's early lapse from virtue rests dark over all the days of his glory. Before he has fairly established himself upon his throne, before there is any Round Table of knights at his beck and call, Merlin confronts him with the
I - 37 solemn warning: "Ye have done a thing late that God is displeased with you, - - he have gotten a child that shall destroy you and all the knights of your realm." And Merlin's prophecy is horribly fulfilled on that day when the armies of Arthur and
II - 387 Mordred fight to mutual extermination, and father and son deal to one another the mortal thrust.

There is in the reckless boldness of Malory's knights a strong tincture of fatalism. Over the mystic sword of Balin
Cf.
I - 69-70 hangs a curse for any who shall presume to draw it, except he
II - 166 be "the best knight of the world." But the knight who should therefore shun it would risk the scorn of all his fellows. Convinced of the futility of any effort to escape what fate has ordained, these men fling themselves with utter abandon into any adventure which presents itself. Once, upon the warning of Gawaine's ghost, Arthur does attempt to circumvent his fate. But in vain! At the very moment of apparent success, the casual
II - 386 sting of "an adder out of a little heath bush" sets all his calculations at nought. Yet fate itself is to the knights of the Morte Darthur no merely impersonal force. It is rather the
II - 346 high decree of God. "All is welcome that God sendeth us", declares Sir Bors. Before one thing only does the courage of the hardiest quail. The siege perilous is held in universal respect and a certain religious awe, rather than a purely physi-

cal fear, seems to guarantee its inviolability. The chosen of God is destined to claim it in God's good time, and it would be the part of folly, not of knightly virtue, for any other to aspire to it.

The mingled piety and fatalism of these knights is admirably illustrated in the sole form of trial to which a woman might have recourse. For her the law of the land knew no other court than the jousts, the tournament, or the battle-field. Whether wronged in person or estate, her hope of redress depended absolutely upon her success in finding a knight both willing and able to maintain her cause. Queen Guenever herself must
I - 275 prove her innocence thus, if at all, when accused of poisoning Sir Patrise. The husband of the accused party could not, in this case, defend her good name, because being king, he was her judge. Only the appearance of a champion capable of defeating her accuser in a fair fight could save her from death by fire. "God speed the right," prayed the king, as he set the day which should determine his queen's fate. For it was held that in a righteous world, Heaven would assure victory to the righteous cause.

The world of chivalry was, then, essentially a world of law and order—a world directed and controlled by a righteous God, to whom, in the end, its inhabitants must render strict account. There was, however, one disturbing element that constantly threatened to reduce its order to chaos. Magic, in various forms, figured largely in the experience of the knights of the Round Table. It seems indeed natural, rather than supernatural, that it should have its place in the marvellous adventures

which they met at every turn. Undefined and unfathomed possibility is the essence of romance, and magic was an agency in good and regular standing in the romantic world. In the life of Arthur himself it played no inconspicuous part. The potent magic of Merlin, as also that of Nimue, the Lady of the Lake, served him many a good turn, while he was forced to be ever on his guard against the machinations of his treacherous sister, Morgan le Fay. But the power of magic was a strictly limited one, after all. It was never allowed to circumvent the will of God, and even served directly, at times, in the furtherance of
I - 127 his purposes. By the magic of Dame Brisen, Launcelot became the father of Galahad, as fate had ordained that he should. But the magic wiles whereby the evil one sought to pollute Sir
I - 204 Percivale were nullified, at the critical moment, by the sign of the cross.

Such, in broad outline, was the religion of chivalry, such the world through which the knights of Malory move. It must, however, be confessed that there often seems small connection between their faith and their works. This discrepancy may be real and fundamental, in which case we should be forced to the conclusion that Carlyle was mistaken in supposing that belief determines action. Or it may be only apparent, or, at most, superficial. The settlement of this question must rest upon a detailed study of environment, training and moral standards. We pass first, therefore, to a brief consideration of the political and social order of the Morte Darthur.

CHAPTER IV.

The Political and Social Order of the Morte Darthur.

"The knightly ages will always enjoy the glory of having formulated a code of honour which aimed at rendering the upper classes worthy of their exceptional privileges; yet we must judge chivalry not only by its formal code but also by its practical fruits."

"In its own age, chivalry rested practically, like the highest civilization of ancient Greece and Rome, on slave labour."

(George Gordon Coulton, M.A.: Ency. Brit. XV 859-858.)

I - 5 It is asserted of Uther Pendragon that "he was king of all England, and so reigned". Yet no less than eleven kings ap-

I - 22 peared to dispute Arthur's claim to his father's throne, among them monarchs bearing such unmistakably English titles as King of Northumberland and King of Cornwall. It would seem that the England of that day was an aggregation of numerous more or less independent states, and that the mystery surrounding the young king's birth encouraged its more ambitious potentates to deny his right to supremacy. The establishment of his authority cost more than one bitter war, but he knew no rest until the last rebel was humbled. His power seemed at last secure.

But scarcely had he crushed these uprisings at home when

trouble arose from a new quarter. There came to his court
- 130 "twelve ancient men" charged with a peremptory demand for truage, alleged to be due to Lucius, Emperor of Rome, from the realm of England. Arthur's answer was a bold and complete defiance. Not only did he deny all obligation to the Roman Emperor; he declared his fixed intention to take possession of
- 132 the Roman Empire for himself. "Wherefore I command him and all them of Rome, that incontinent they make to me their homage, and to acknowledge me for their Emperor and Governor, upon pain that shall ensue." The twelve ambassadors returned to their master filled with confusion and foreboding. "We let you wit
- 133 (reports their spokesman) that I and my fellows were full sore afeared to behold his countenance - - - . On New Year's Day we saw him in his estate, which was the royalest that ever we saw, for he was served at his table with nine kings, and the noblest fellowship of other princes, lords and knights that be in the world, and every knight approved and like a lord." And in due time Lucius was indeed overthrown, and Arthur crowned
- 151 emperor by the pope.

While yet a comparatively young man Arthur had established his sway over most of the known world, if we may accept the statement made in connection with the wedding of King Meliodas and Queen Elizabeth, the parents of Sir Tristram:

- 238 "At that time King Arthur reigned, and he was whole king of England, Wales and Scotland, and of many other realms: howbeit there were many kings that were lords of many countries, but all they held their lands of King Arthur; for in Wales were two kings, and in the north were many kings; and in Cornwall

and in the west were two kings; also in Ireland were two or three kings, and all were under the obeissance of King Arthur. So was the King of France, and the King of Britanny, and all the lordships unto Rome."

Throughout the Morte Darthur these minor kings continue to be mentioned with all respect for their royal estate. Their lesser courts are maintained in independent splendor and boast many valiant knights. But they turn to Arthur with one accord when serious danger threatens; and a seat at the Round Table is the goal of every noble youth's ambition - the all sufficient reward of conspicuous merit. We may therefore conceive of Arthur as a powerful feudal overlord whose prominence, though freely acknowledged, does not materially affect the dignity of the great vassals under him.

The court of Arthur, in the days of his prime, is linked by ties of the closest friendship to those of King Ban, King Bors and Sir Launcelot, the great lords of France. For many years they make common cause against the Saracens and other "heathen" lords. False knights and all workers of iniquity tremble before them. By persistent vigilance and tireless energy, they succeed in maintaining a degree of security unknown, at least, within the memory of living men. Their fame waxes ever greater, and far and wide resound the plaudits of a grateful people. But this noble alliance is destined to come to a tragic end. The guilty love of Launcelot and the queen is exposed, and with the withdrawal of Launcelot and his kin to their own country, all is changed. Arthur needs none to tell him that the glory of his Round Table has passed away forever.

f. I - 18-19
I - 370
- 151
- 353-
4

Any attempt to reconstruct the social world of chivalry must be based upon the recognition that it is a gentlefolk's world. Kings and queens are so numerous that their high-sounding titles lose much of their impressiveness; dukes, lords and barons abound; noble knights and fair gentlewomen roam every field and wood. But it is only incidentally that the common people appear at all. The world of chivalry has no place for them, save as they now and then form a picturesque background for the pageant of knightly deeds.

It is perhaps idle to seek in the realm of romance a formal classification of society. The romantic spirit is intolerant of restriction, and abhors all semblance of limits and bounds. Yet with due recognition of this fact, we may trace certain broad lines of demarcation, which will serve the practical purpose of the moment, if no more.

At the head of the state stands the king - at the head of Malory's state, Arthur, the king of kings. Beside each king is found his queen, for chivalry could conceive of no lord without his lady. Next in rank stand the nobility, and those few who, lacking noble blood, have yet achieved knighthood. The latter group is, however, so small as to be negligible, for distinguished valor is felt to be the prerogative of gentle birth. The dignitaries and devotees of the church form a highly honored class of themselves. Archbishops and bishops appear occasionally, as do abbots, abbesses and regularly ordained priests. But the religious life of chivalry tends toward asceticism, rather than formally organized ecclesiasticism. Hermits and "holy men" inhabit every forest, mountain and shore, and

they are regarded by high and low with the greatest veneration. The dwarfs and other retainers, who attend the knights in their wanderings, are of humbler degree, yet they enjoy a certain reflected glory from their illustrious masters. Below these stand the yeomen or commons, and quite at the bottom of the social scale, the villains.

Though Arthur's government is a kingdom (an empire, indeed) in form, it is distinctly an oligarchy in spirit. If the shadowy commons and villains could but be eliminated, it would appear altogether democratic. The really living men and women of chivalry are all aristocrats, and among them the great Arthur himself would never assume to dictate. His knights approach him with the respect due to his position and his proved worth, but with no trace of servility. Neither he nor his queen enjoys any special immunities because of their royal estate. Sir Bors does not hesitate to speak his mind to Guenever when she begs him to defend her against the calumny of Sir Mador.
- 277 "Madam (he says) I marvel how ye dare for shame require me to do anything for you, in so much ye have chased him out of your country by whom we were borne up and honoured." Sir Mador
- 275 speaks with equal frankness to the king: "My gracious lord - - ye must hold me excused, for though ye be our king in that degree, ye are but a knight as we are, and ye are sworn unto knighthood as well as we." And Arthur allows his contention. The queen must die an ignominious death if Sir Mador succeeds
- 379 in establishing his charge against her. For "such custom was used in those days, that neither for favour, neither for love nor affinity, there should be none other but righteous judgment,

as well upon a king as upon a knight, and as well upon a queen as upon another poor lady". The last few words might seem to prove that all classes of society enjoyed equal favor, but this is not borne out by the general tone of the Morte Darthur.

The knights form among themselves a great fraternity which is composed of many smaller circles. Each king is surrounded by a retinue of knights who are bound to one another in the closest brotherhood. There are also a few striking instances of yet more intimate groups based upon ties of blood. Preeminent among these stand the kin of Launcelot, and Gawaine and his brethren. Among the latter, however, there is a more or less distinct line of cleavage, Gawaine himself adhering now to the depraved Mordred and Agravaine, now to the more noble Gareth and Gaheris. A certain class sympathy unites all good knights, and their mutual relations are defined and prescribed by an elaborate code, which will later be considered in detail. The fellowship of Arthur's Round Table is so close and so sacred that no knight lives or dies to himself. "When the king, and the queen, and all the lords knew of the treason of Sir Meliagrance they were all ashamed on his behalf." II - 329

Such was the bond of union among the knights themselves. The exact significance of their order for the common weal is not so easily determined. Tennyson's ideal knight,

> "Who reverenced his conscience as his king,
> Whose glory was redressing human wrong,"

dication
Idylls
the King

is manifestly a man of nobler mold than the great majority of Malory's heroes. In the Grail quest alone do we find a few to whom this description might fairly be applied. Yet Maynadier declares that "the prime object of Galahad himself seems to have

The Arthur of the English Poets 382

been self-glorification". Unselfish devotion to the common welfare (in the broadest sense of the term) lay quite beyond the horizon of the knights of Malory. They were indeed sworn to defend the right. They displayed often an admirable zeal in crushing the wrong. But their vows covered a comparatively narrow field, and their sympathies were correspondingly circumscribed.

The vows of the Round Table knights were renewed every year "at the high feast of Pentecost". To just what did they commit themselves? Arthur "charged them never to do outrageousity nor murder, and always to flee treason; also, by no means to be cruel, but to give mercy unto him that asketh mercy, upon pain of forfeiture of their worship and lordship of King Arthur for evermore; and always to do ladies, damosels and gentlewomen succour, upon pain of death. Also that no man take no battles in a wrongful quarrel for no law, nor for no world's goods."

I - 90

- 89-90

All this is excellent so far as it goes, but two facts are worthy of note. 1.) That most of this charge is negative and calculated only to render the knight himself a safe and decent citizen; and 2.) That the positive duty of affording succor in time of need applies only to gentlewomen. Nothing here commits these knights to the general redress of human wrong. There are, moreover, indications that the Round Table itself absorbs more than its legitimate share of the king's care and interest. When he foresees the havoc destined to spring from the quest of the Grail, it is the loss of his knights, not the demoralization of his kingdom, that he mourns.

I - 172 "For I have had an old custom to have them in my fellowship," he sighs. Still later, as the shadows of inevitable doom close about him, he renews the same lament: "And now I dare I - 353 say, - - - there never was Christian king held such a fellowship together; and alas that Sir Launcelot and I should be at debate."

Yet in spite of all this, it is clear that the Round f. p. 101 Table did render distinguished public service. In the peace f. p. 47 of Arthur's realm and the loyalty of his subjects we have ample proof that their interpretation of duty was broader than their vows. Though the damosels who appealed to them were always ladies of high degree, the response to their call frequently led to the removal of abuses which bore equally heavily upon the poor. Errant knights in search of adventure also helped to rid the land of evil-doers; and in time of invasion the knights were the efficient defenders of the state.

I - 101 The court of Arthur was intensely religious, after its own fashion, the king himself setting the example of deep piety. Both the regular clergy and the hermits who thronged the land I - 82 -101 enjoyed superior respect as men of God. The knights heard mass upon every possible occasion, they asked the prayers of "good I - 212 -219 men" in all sorts of undertakings, they accepted rebuke from the latter in all humility, and they often returned devout thanks to God. This outward piety was a sort of ritualistic ceremonial which belonged to the high order of knighthood. It was only during the quest of the Grail, however, that it assumed profound significance. Under ordinary circumstances the knightly

religion was largely a matter of form, and "clene confession" too often covered a multitude of sins.

The hermits of the Morte Darthur afford in themselves a fascinating subject for study. They are of divers sorts and pass their lives in widely differing ways. Gawaine and Ector
II - 217 found Nacien, the hermit, gathering herbs "as he which had tasted none other meat of a great while", and when Sir Tor and
I - 82 his dwarf took lodging in a hermitage, "full hard was their supper". Yet when Sir Launcelot, grievously wounded, sought
II - 292 similar refuge, "the hermit called to him two of his servants - - - and laid him in his bed - - - and made him to drink good wine, so that Sir Launcelot was well refreshed and knew himself; for in these days (Malory explains) it was not the guise of hermits as is nowadays, for there were none hermits in those days but that they had been men of worship and of prowess; and those hermits held great household". Launcelot's benefactor proved, indeed, to be a former knight of the Round Table.

When the Bishop of Canterbury was obliged to flee for his life, because of his refusal to be party to the evil doings of Mordred, he also became a hermit. And his hermitage forms the setting of most of the closing scenes of the Morte Darthur.
II - 390 Thither came the desolate Sir Bedivere, as he aimlessly wandered the forest after the passing of Arthur. There apparently, his king lay buried, and there in lowly service and "in fasting and in prayers" he remained to the end of his days. Thither came
II - 395 -396 too the remorseful Sir Launcelot, when he had seen all the havoc of his sin. And there he "endured in great penance six year", then "took the habit of priesthood of the Bishop and a

twelvemorth he sang mass". Thither, in course of time, came
I - 396 yet seven more of Arthur's "noble knights". "And when they saw Sir Launcelot had taken him to such perfection, they had no list to depart, but took such an habit as he had." Thus did the hermit Bishop become the center of a sort of monastery wherein the last sad remnant of the Round Table held ghostly fellowship, till Launcelot died.

f. I - 53 & 117 The dwarfs who attend various knights are an interesting
I - 181 little people. Beaumains makes his first appearance at Arthur's court in the company of three retainers, one of whom is a dwarf. The latter serves, on this occasion, in the capacity
I - 184 of equerry, and reappears, a year later, with horse and armor for Beaumains, on the day when that youth is to be dubbed a knight. Later he accompanies his young lord on his first quest. But fate has ordained that he shall be taken prisoner, and Beaumains follows his trail with a persistence which fully
I - 211 justifies the dwarf's own boast: "He will never out of this country until that he have me again." Though the new-made knight is warned that he is running into great danger, he presses on until his companion is once more at his side. Then he exclaims
I - 212 affectionately: "O my fellow, - - - I have had many adventures for thy sake." Sir Tor also has a devoted follower, whom he
I - 81 acquired in a somewhat unusual manner. As that knight rode forth upon a quest, he was rudely intercepted by a dwarf who, striking his horse, demanded that he fight with his master. Tor acceded to this with reluctance, but easily gained the victory. The dwarf's pride was immediately touched. Desiring a boon of Sir Tor, he declared: "I ask no more - - - but

that ye will suffer me to do you service, for I will serve no more recreant knights." And attaching himself to Tor, he became, to some degree, his guide. Such dwarfs seem to have been whimsically chosen as squires, and apparently enjoyed a considerable measure of intimacy with those whose fortunes they shared.

Young men of higher standing sometimes served in the capacity of squires, especially with the great knights. They felt, like the dwarfs, the honor of close association with men so illustrious, and found no degradation in the service. Some cherished the hope of becoming knights at the hands of their
I - 178 lords, as e. g., Melias de Lile, who joined himself to Sir
I - 285 Galahad at the "deadly bed" of King Evelake. Others like Lavaine, became associated with older knights by chance, or for expediency, and contirued to follow them for love. It is worthy of note that no good knight would brook wrong to his
I - 140 squire. As Beaumains risked his life for his dwarf, so Sir Aglovale placed his in jeopardy to avenge the murder of a "servant", to whom he afterward gave Christian burial.

It is only occasionally that yeoman and villains are
I - 242 clearly distinguished in the Morte Darthur. Sir Tristram, the aristocrat, is credited with the codification, if not the invertion, of "the goodly terms that gentlemen have and use, and shall to the day of doom, that thereby in a manner all men of worship may dissever a gentleman from a yeoman, and from a yeoman a villain". But the dividing line is seldom visible in the book itself. So definitely is the world of chivalry an aristocrat's world, that the terms "yeomen", "poor men" and

"commons" appear to designate with small discrimination that whole substratum which constitutes the substantial foundation of the state. Without these humbler masses, the knights themselves would have had less leisure for romantic adventure. They would have been forced to give more personal time and attention to procuring the necessities of life. This fact seems, however, to have escaped them, as it has other favored classes, even to the present day. Their instinctive attitude toward the masses seems to have been one of contemptuous tolerance, when they did not ignore them altogether. Even the generous and high-souled Launcelot, who would have scorned to strike a defenceless knight, gave to a poor carter who refused
I - 320 his will, "such a buffet that he fell to the earth stark dead." The blow was indeed the outcome of intense excitement, but he seems never to have wasted so much as a passing regret upon it in calmer mood. This is a fact sadly significant of the "poor man's"share in the glories of chivalry. He was too often a mere pawn in the game played by his social superiors.

Yet there were times when the multitude rose to assert their right to a share in the game for themselves. The genuire popularity of King Arthur appears, now and again, as the people are able to press for a moment to the foreground. We have seen that his throne was fiercely contested in the beginning, and it looked, on one occasion, as though the combined power of Excalibur and his knights might not suffice to save his
- 17 cause. "And then the commons of Carlion arose with clubs and staves and slew many knights." The enemy fled; the day was won. Again, under more auspicious circumstances, the people

- 151 gave evidence of their loyalty when Arthur returned from his coronation in Rome. He "was nobly received of all his commons in every city and borough, and great gifts presented to him at his home-coming to welcome him with".

The masses realized their own helplessness, and were duly grateful for knightly protection and patronage. Sir Palomides once took it upon himself to avenge the murder of a certain King Hermance of the Red City. Upon his arrival there, "all
- 79 the people praised him" and "made passing great joy of him", and when they saw their city delivered from the false knights
- 81 Sir Helius and Sir Helake, they "proffered Sir Palomides the the third part of their goods so that he would abide with them".
- 183 The Castle of Maidens, which appears to have been practically a city, welcomed Sir Galahad with like acclaim. There he "saw so much people in the streets that he might not number them, and all said: Sir, ye be welcome, for long have we abiden here our deliverance".

It is from such fleeting glimpses as these, or when perchance, an errant knight meets a yeoman in the forest, that we must draw our conclusions regarding the humbler folk of the world of chivalry. They are, for the most part, obscured by the glittering array of "lords and gentlemen of arms", of ladies and fair damosels. Their voice is drowned by the clash of steel on steel, and all the varied clamor of the tournament. But they are there, and they must be reckoned with in any fair estimate of the moral and social significance of chivalry.

Having considered the social order in its larger divisions,

we now turn our attention to the more intimate group of the family. The ties of blood were very strong among Malory's knights. Family feeling, of a certain sort, is intense. Yet it is plain that genuine family life suffered under serious disabilities, if it was able to maintain itself at all, under the conditions of chivalry. The father of the family must perforce pass much of his time away from home. Tournaments and quests made large demands upon him, quite apart from the more serious necessities of war. The boys, too, early left the parental roof. At fifteen, or thereabout, they were considered ripe for knighthood, and riding away to join the court of Arthur, or some other king, they were lost to the home forever. Father and son often followed diverging ways, and brother became parted from brother; but the lure of adventure drew them on, and new interests soon filled to repletion the life of the young knight. The lot of the mothers and sisters was quite different. They must wait long and patiently in the lonely home for news which might never come, or which coming, might serve only to confirm their worst fears. The story of Sir Percivale illustrates, in tragic wise, the practical working of this system.

- 135 When Sir Launcelot mysteriously disappeared from the court many knights set forth in search of him, and since there was no clue to follow, each took his own course. Sir Percivale and
- 138-'9 Sir Aglovale seized the opportunity to pay a visit to their mother. "And when she saw her two sons, for joy she wept tenderly. And then she said: Ah, my dear sons, when your father was slain he left me four sons, of the which now be twain slain."

On her knees she begged them not to leave her again, lest anxiety for them prove too much for her feeble strength. But knightly duty forbade them to remain, and they left her "swooning in middes
I - 192 -193 of the court". Time passed and Percivale rode in quest of the Grail. Happening upon a hermitage in a waste forest, he learned that the recluse there dwelling was his aunt. To her he acknowledged that he knew not whether his mother were dead or alive. "Certes, fair nephew (said she), your mother is dead, for after your departure from her she took such a sorrow that anon, after she was confessed, she died." Still later Percivale met his own sister and with her passed through great adventures. But she was to him only a strange gentlewoman, until she revealed her identity. The sight of her stirred no memory in mind or heart.

Yet blood relationship bound knight to knight in indissoluble bonds of loyalty and mutual obligation. Brothers long parted were wont to meet with extravagant demonstrations of joy. Not infrequently, however, as was the way of errant knights, they fell to blows with so slight ceremony that there was no time for previous recognition. The very horror of this situation seems to have possessed a certain fascination for the romancers who shaped these stories. It recurs again and again.
- 68 Balin and Balan actually fight to the death, learning the truth only in time to bid one another a last farewell. But a more opportune recognition usually averts the final catastrophe, as
- 233 e. g. in the meeting of Gawaine and Gareth, and of Palomides
- 115 and Safere. The unnatural fury of Sir Lionel against Sir Bors
· 231-'4 introduces a rare exception to the general rule. The expostulations and pleadings of Sir Bors are all without avail, yet he hesitates to lift his hand against a brother, even in self-

defense. In the end, Heaven itself interposes by a miracle to save him from such infamy.

The ties of blood were often strong among relatives of more remote degree. This is especially conspicuous in the clannish spirit which united the kin of Sir Launcelot. Their devotion to
I - 137 their leader amounts to adoration. "I dare say and make it good, that all kings, christian nor heathen, may not find such a knight, for to speak of his noblenes and courtesy, with his beauty and gentleness," wails Sir Bors, when he learns of Launcelot's disappearance from the court. And "Alas, said Sir Bors, what shall we do that be of his blood? Alas, said Sir Ector de Maris. Alas,
I - 393 said Lionel." And with one accord they set forth in search of him.

Pride of birth naturally played an important role in a society so essentially aristocratic as that under consideration. Noble blood counted for well-nigh everything. Not only did it imply high obligation; it was held to be almost a guarantee of high achievement. Conversely, supreme distinction was clear
I - 167 proof of noble blood. The young Galahad is first introduced to Arthur as "of king's lineage, and of the kindred of Joseph of Aramathie" (the latter, "a noble knight"!). But this is not enough. Guenever adds yet more interesting information:
I - 171 "Sir Launcelot is come but of the eighth degree from our Lord Jesu Christ, and Sir Galahad is of the ninth degree from our Lord Jesu Christ, therefore I dare say they be the greatest gentlemen of the world."

Here we have, in epitome, the essential spirit of the social world of chivalry. Aristocracy, piety, romanticism could go no further.

CHAPTER V.

Woman: Her Exaltation and Her Degradation under Chivalry.

"Why, said La Beale Isoud, are ye a knight and be no lover? It is a shame to you: wherefore ye may not be called a good knight but if ye make a quarrel for a lady."

"And therefore, said the king, wit you well my heart was never so heavy as it is now, and much more I am sorrier for my good knights' loss than for the loss of my fair queen; for queens I might have enow, but such a fellowship of good knights shall never be together in no company."

(Malory: Morte Darthur, II-65 and II-353.)

There are a few words in every language which have acquired a sacred significance as the expression of a people's holiest ideals. Such a word is chivalry. Into itself it has gathered a whole category of virtues, fusing them into a unity which it has enriched with a rare essence of its own. A word of this nature appeals primarily to the heart and the emotions, rather than the intellect, and having no synonyms, it is peculiarly difficult to define. Yet definition of terms is the first essential of clear thinking. If we then pause to consider the word chivalry, we shall almost surely find linked with it in our thought the word woman. It is indeed impossible to form any adequate conception of chivalry, without taking into account the part played by woman in the historical institution known by

that name. The Standard Dictionary defines chivalry as follows:

"1. The knightly system of feudal times - - especially, the system as marked by championship of woman and of knightly honor.

"2. The spirit of knighthood, as distinguished for its heroic and romantic deeds; knight-errantry; hence, disinterested courtesy; bravery; magnanimity; honor."

Whatever the origin or primal significance of chivalry, there can be no question that the Morte Darthur represents knightly honor as inseparably bound up with "championship of woman". Throned high above the rough hurly-burly of man's strife, woman is here, theoretically at least, the center of a sort of ritual of honor. To her every sword is dedicated. Every knight of the Round Table is sworn, as we have seen, "to
I - 90 do ladies, damosels, and gentlewomen succour, upon pain of death," and obligation to a lady takes precedence of every other duty.
I - 207 Though "the red knight of the red laundes" has long "done passing ill and shamefully", his evil conduct is held excusable when he explains that "all that he did was at a lady's request". So nearly does a lady's request approximate a command that it behooves no knight to inquire too closely into the justice of her cause. Launcelot boasts to Queen Guenever: "I never
I - 343 failed you in right nor in wrong sithen the first day King Arthur made me knight." It is not even incumbent on a gentlewoman to give a reason for requiring a knight's service. We
I - 237 read that the imperative summons of a maiden once roused Galahad from his sleep before daybreak. "Then Galahad went to her and asked her what she would. Galahad, said she, I will that ye arm you, and mount upon your horse and follow me, for I shall

show you within there three days the highest adventure that ever any knight saw. Anon Galahad armed him, and took his horse, and commended him to God, and bad the gentlewoman go, and he would follow there as she liked."

I - 62 "A knight may never be of prowess but if he be a lover,"
I - 114 declares Sir Tristram. "I have marvel that so valiant a man as ye be love no ladies nor damosels," says Sir Gawaine to Sir Marhaus, whose hardiness he has just proved. For extraordinary tales were told of this knight - that he "hated all ladies and gentlewomen". "Sir, said Sir Marhaus, they name me wrongfully those that give me that name - - ; to all good ladies and gentlewomen I owe my service as a knight ought to do."

I - 93 "Well I wot that love is a great mistress," says Launcelot, when Sir Palomides has especially distinguished himself at a tournament. And Palomides makes bold confession to his rival,
I - 120 -'21 Sir Tristram: "I will that ye wit that I have loved La Beale Isoud many a day, and she has been the causer of my worship, and else I had been the most simplest knight in the world. For by her, and by cause of her, I have won the worship that I have." The balance was turned on more than one hard fought field by the alchemy of love. When Beaumains was about to go
- 206 down in defeat before the red knight, the maiden Linet called from her window above: "O Sir Beaumains, where is thy courage become? Alas, my lady my sister beholdeth thee, and she sobbeth and weepeth, that maketh mine heart heavy. When Sir Beaumains heard her say so, he abrayed up with a great might and gat him upon his feet, and lightly he leapt to his sword and gripped it in his hand, and doubled his pace unto the red knight and there they fought a new battle together." And

Sir Beaumains came off victor.

Such is the ideal of the Morte Darthur. Woman is the pivot upon which the whole structure of chivalry is balanced. Her weakness constitutes its own sufficient claim to the service of man's strength; his strength finds its driving power in her weakness - and her love. She is his queen, his inspirer, his guiding star; he is her champion, her adorer, almost her slave. Nothing could be simpler or more clean-cut than this ideal, so long as we regard it either in the abstract, or as exemplified in a few carefully selected instances. But beyond this the case is not so clear. If we seek to deduce our ideal from every-day knightly conduct, we find it strangely elusive. As the true motive of action we can trace it but seldom. We are, then, confronted by the question, how far this ideal is actually operative in chivalric society.

Prof. George Gordon Coulton of Cambridge University, says: "It may be true that, in the comparative scarcity of historical evidence, 12th century romances present a more favourable picture of chivalry at that earlier time; but even such historical evidence as we possess, when carefully scrutinized, is enough to dispel the illusion that there was any period of the middle ages in which the unselfish championship of 'God and the ladies' was anything but a rare exception."

cy. Brit. V - 858

This conclusion is in perfect harmony with the testimony of the Morte Darthur. The knightly deference to woman appears too often but as a veil to an ill-concealed contempt. Sir Tristram once met in a forest his old enemy Sir Sagwarides. "Sir, said Sagwarides, I know you for Sir Tristram de Liones,

- 292

the man in the world that I have most cause to hate, because ye departed the love between me and my wife; but as for that, said Sir Sagwarides, I will never hate a noble knight for a light lady; and therefore, I pray you, be my friend, and I will be yours unto my power."

It is to be feared that Sagwarides has here epitomized the true, as opposed to the theoretical, attitude of chivalry toward woman. King Arthur was unmistakably of like mind in
I - 14 this matter. When the illicit love of Sir Lamorak and the king's sister, Margawse of Orkney, had terminated in the murder of the lady by her own son, "the king was passing wroth and commanded him to go out of his court". But what of the knight who had caused all the trouble? "I dare say ye shall lose that good knight, Sir Lamorak, the which is great pity," said Sir Launcelot. "God defend, said the noble King Arthur, that I should lose Sir Lamorak." And he proceeded to do his utmost, both to hold the offerder at his court and to guarantee his safety there!

Such instances are as straws which show the direction of the wind. By a judicious selection of evidence, it would seem easy to prove that chivalry knew no genuine respect for woman whatever. Sir Launcelot, barring his one fatal weakness, is gentle, noble, courteous, beyond compare. Yet he offers, as
I - 153 the reward of a successful joust, "a fair maid and a gerfal-
· II-40 con"! A fair maid was not infrequently the stake of tournament or joust, and her share in the outcome of the contest apparently gave no one the slightest concern. She was a piece of property to be handed over to the winner, precisely as was the diamond

Lancelot and Elaine 31

for which Tennyson's knights entered the lists. It is true that the maid herself was occasionally allowed to speak the decisive word when two knights laid equal claim to her. But such cases were the exception, not the rule.

Curious complications sometimes arose from the astonishing readiness of Arthur and others of high degree to "grant a boon". The petitioner to whom this favor was extended might be a total stranger, but he was never required to make his request specific in advance, and acquiescence, once given, could on no condition be withdrawn. Here again a woman stood quite on a par with a horse or a coat of mail. When, therefore, Sir Bleoberis de-

I - 259

manded, as a promised boon, "the fairest lady" in King Mark's court, he was perforce allowed to ride away unmolested with the wife of Sir Sagwarides. None might say him nay, least of all the lady herself. For her, the helpless victim, there was no alternative. She could but follow her new lord, hoping against hope that some knight stronger than he might yet effect her rescue.

If this be chivalry, it would seem that the twentieth century is far astray in its understanding of that term. Shall we then conclude that Malory's presentation of chivalry is a degraded or misleading one? We must meet this question fairly, for if answered in the affirmative, it would render the present study worse than useless. The weight of expert opinion falls, however, on the other side. The most realistic portrayals of chivalry are to be found in the romances of various countries, and we have the testimony of no less an authority than George

cy. Brit. I - 113

Saintsbury that Malory's "book - - - though far later than the original forms, (does not) convey a very false impression of the characteristics of the older romances". But that of

these romances? Are they perhaps all alike untrustworthy? Their heroic tales unquestionably transcend the bounds of possible fact, their graphic pictures are painted in colors overbright. But competent judges find in history the verification of their essential spirit. We quote once more from Prof. Coulton: "Even Gautier, while he contends that chivalry did much to refine morality, is compelled to admit the prevailing immorality to which the medieval romances testify, and the extraordinary free behaviour of the unmarried ladies. No doubt these romances, taken alone, might give as unfair an idea as modern French novels give of Parisian morals, but we have abundant other evidence for placing the moral standard of the age of chivalry definitely below that of educated society in the present day."

Ency. Brit. XV - 854 (Foot-note)

We must then accept Malory's picture of chivalry as substantially fair, even though it prove in some respects disappointing. And it is undeniably disappointing as regards woman, and the mutual relations of the sexes. We have seen that the knight was often deficient in true respect to the ladies; we shall find that the character of the ladies themselves was seldom calculated to inspire reverence.

There are, to be sure, a few - a very few - of Malory's women who pass unscathed through all the adventures of their strange world. Such, for example, is the sister of Sir Percivale, whose spotless purity shines only the more brightly for the dark background against which it is projected. She voluntarily gave her life to save a total stranger, who could be healed of deadly disease only by "the blood of a maid and a clene virgin in will and in work, and a king's daughter". But

I - 252

Galahad and Percivale found in the neighboring churchyard
II - 253 "a three score fair tombs", in which lay the bodies of as many other "maidens", who had shed their blood in vain, though "twelve of them were kings' daughters". Nor does the implication of this passage seem any injustice to the gentlewomen of Arthur's court. The scheming Morgan le Fay once sent to the
- 286-'7 great king "a fair horn harnessed with gold, and the horn had such a virtue that there might no lady nor gentlewoman drink of that horn but if she were true to her husband, and if she were false she should spill all the drink, and if she were true to her lord she might drink peaceable. - - - Then the king made Queen Isoud to drink thereof, and an hundred ladies, and there were but four ladies of all those that drank clene."

Among the knights the case is even worse. Two only, Sir
II-203 -'4 Galahad and Sir Percivale, could lay claim to be "maidens clene and without spot"; and of these, one had escaped pollution
I - 257 only "so as by fire". Two others there were, Sir Launcelot and
I - 264 Sir Bors, whose superior virtues entitled them to some degree of
I-271 success in the Grail quest. Yet Sir Launcelot returned straight to his old sin, once that quest was ended; and Sir Bors was not
II-341 -'2 above aiding and abetting him in it.

The whole Morte Darthur is permeated by a strange inconsistency regarding maidenly virtue. Theoretically, and in the abstract, it is a maid's one priceless treasure, for the loss of which there can be no adequate recompense. Practically, and in the concrete, this treasure is often treated with scant consideration, both by the maid herself and by those who should be her natural guardians. The same is true, in some degree, of the "maiden knight".

Before the inward eye of Malory's knights there hovered ever the ideal of stainless chastity. At times it would seem as though there were no sin save against this one all-holy virtue. It is Arthur's youthful lust which confronts him, on the last fatal day, in the person of Mordred. It is Sir Bors' one lapse from virtue which costs him long and bitter penance in the quest of the Grail. And it is Launcelot's guilty love which not only bars him personally from the Grail castle, but which also sows the seed from which the whole Round Table reaps destruction.

I - 37
I - 387
I - 220
I - 349

Launcelot, on one occasion, passed the night with a hermit who asked him what he sought in that country. "Sir, said Sir Launcelot, I go to seek the adventures of the Sangreal. Well, said he, seek it ye may well, but though it were here ye shall have no power to see it no more than a blind man should see a bright sword; and that is long on your sin, and else ye were more abler than any man living."

I - 207

Such spiritual blindness, the all but universal heritage of sin among the knights of chivalry, may be held to explain much that is otherwise inexplicable. Why did fate ordain that the one peerless and stainless knight should himself be born of an unholy union, consummated by the aid of magic and deceit? How could the virtuous maiden Elaine reconcile herself so easily to her share in the ruse? And did King Pelles hold so lightly his daughter's good name? This is a theme which might be pursued indefinitely, and lead, in the end, only to mystification. When Sir Bors recognized in the child Galahad the features of Launcelot, "he wept for joy". Did he then feel neither shame

I - 126
I - 129

nor regret at this seeming proof that the great Lancelot was, after all, "wanderingly loved"? It helps the matter but little to remember that the great king himself was of like parentage. The legitimacy of his birth was indeed assured by a seeming trick of fate. But what then was fate? We have already seen that it was no mysterious force working outside of, or contrary to, the moral law. The knightly conception of fate was rather that of Swinburne's Balen:

The Tale of Balen

> "'God's will,' quoth he, 'it is, we know,
> Wherewith our lives are bound!'"

Yet if "cleneness" of life was the prime condition of success
II - 126 in the holy quest of the Grail, could it be God's will which ordained that the "clene" knight should be of "unclene" birth?

I - 198 Sir Persant of Inde did not hesitate to send his eighteen year old daughter to tempt his youthful guest Beaumains. Was this an act of sheer depravity, or was it a justifiable method of trying the young man's mettle? There is, at least, no suggestion in the text, that it was seriously reprehensible. Sir Persant conducts himself otherwise quite as a good knight should; and Beaumains, as yet inexperienced in the ways of the world, exhibits no consequent aversion to him afterward. It is, indeed, noteworthy that respect for the laws of hospitality, rather than reverence for the purity of the maiden, prompts Beaumains to repel her advances. Yet it would seem that an errant knight might do violence to both hospitality and maidenly virtue without incurring the grave displeasure of his host.
I - 156 For Sir Tor, returning after fifteen years to the scene of his early transgression, finds an especially warm welcome awaiting him, as father of the king's grandson.

. There is more than one analogous riddle in the realm of conjugal fidelity. Sir Tristram once succeeded, after long scheming, in carrying off his uncle's wife, Isoud, and the two became Launcelot's guests in the Castle of Joyous Gard. "When
I - 57 King Arthur wist that Sir Tristram was escaped and come from King Mark, and had brought La Beale Isoud with him, then was he passing glad." And he forthwith "let cry" a tournament in his honor! Was this then the measure of the king's respect for marriage vows? It is impossible, within the limits of our present discussion, to enter into a detailed study of the complicated question of love and marriage among Malory's knights. We have already found sufficient evidence to prove that wedlock was not necessarily a bond of paramount importance among them. Its violation was, upon occasion, regarded with equanimity, though of formal divorce they seem to have known nothing. What then may be said of their standard of mutual fidelity between man and woman?

The Morte Darthur abounds in tales, pretty or painful, of amorous knights and languishing ladies. True love had its victims then as now. There is no more pathetic figure in all
I - 285 literature than Elaine, "the fair maiden of Astolat". "For
I - 304 sweet Lord Jesu, said the fair maiden, I take Thee to record, on Thee I was never great offencer against thy laws; but that I loved this noble knight, Sir Launcelot, out of measure, and of myself, good Lord, I might not withstand the fervent love wherefore I have my death." And no picture could be more touchingly eloquent of true chivalry, than that of Balin and
- 52-'3 the maiden whose lover he has unwittingly slain. "She took the

sword from her love that lay dead, and fell to the ground in a swoon. And when she arose she made great dole out of measure, the which sorrow grieved Balin passingly sore, and he went unto her for to have taken the sword out of her hand, but she held it so fast that he might not take it out of her hand unless he should have hurt her, and suddenly she set the pommel to the ground, and rove herself through the body. - - - Alas, said Balin, me repenteth sore the death of this knight, for the love of this damosel, for there was much true love betwixt them both. And for sorrow he might not longer behold him, but turned his horse and looked toward a great forest."

It is, however, undeniable that the great loves of the Morte Darthur are, for the most part, illicit. There are scattered instances of the idyllic devotion of such innocent
I - 35 lovers as Alisander and Alice la Beale Pilgrim. But these are the exceptions. The love of Elaine for Launcelot was, in its
I - 302 essence, a pure maiden passion, yet she was ready to follow him
I - 118-123 in an unhallowed union, if she might not as his wife. The love of Pelleas for Ettard, though it well-nigh cost that unfortunate youth his life, was transferred with surprising despatch to Nimue; and the tardy love of Ettard for him, though it did
- 123 actually cost her life, was the work of enchantment.

There are, in the Morte Darthur, two supreme love-stories which eclipse all others both in romantic interest and in far-reaching significance. The first is that of Launcelot and Guenever, the second, that of Tristram and Isoud. Through each of these stories run threads of unrequited love which involve the fortunes of others with those of the principal actors.

. II-135 Launcelot suffers grievous agony by reason of Guenever's
&
- 303 jealousy of the two Elaines, while Tristram's devotion to Isoud
of Ireland is compromised by his marriage to Isoud of Brittany,
- 120 and closely rivalled by the hopeless passion of Sir Palomides.
-'1
- 14 There is one other story, that of the unhappy love of Sir
Lamorak and Queen Margawse, which may be placed beside these
two, though by no means on a par with them.

Let us examine briefly these three out-standing love-tales. It is to be noted, first of all, that Guenever, Isoud of Ireland and Margawse are all married women, the last named, being, in-
- 13 deed, the mother of five knights of the Round Table. Yet the royal husbands of these ladies figure chiefly as disturbing elements in the course of their true love for other men. Tris-
- 272 tram and La Beale Isoud are victims of a magic potion which to some degree relieves them of accountability. But for Launcelot and Guenever there are no such extenuating circumstances, and Lamorak and Margawse are equally without excuse. Though Palo-
- 121 mides boasts that he has been Isoud's knight "guerdonless", he makes it quite plain that it is Sir Tristram, not King Mark, who stands between him and his lady. Her husband is in no way concerned in the matter.

It is a significant fact that abiding faithfulness in love is made conspicuous only in such loves as these. Launcelot was
- 271 "in his privy thoughts and in his mind so set inwardly to the queen", and she to him, that she herself declared: "Through
- 394 thee and me is the flower of kings and knights destroyed." Lamorak and Queen Margawse loved one another so "passing sore"
- 14 that it cost both their lives in the end. Palomides, pining
-335

1 - 120 in his loneliness until he "was disturbed and defaded, nothing like that he was", confidently expected that he would share the fate of "the noble knight, Sir Kehidius, that died for the love of La Beale Isoud". And Tristram's memory of that fair lady rendered his union with Isoud of Brittany a marriage in name only. For these examples of distinguished constancy there are no parallels in wedded love. Arthur's fidelity to his queen is negative, rather than positive, in character. Having once secured the maiden of his choice, he turns his attention to other matters, and his interest in the fair sex is henceforward largely hypothetical. Other loyal husbands and wives there are, to be sure, but they are for the most part obscure or uninteresting. We are forced to the conclusion that fervent love thrives best, if forbidden - that it seldom survives for any considerable time its logical fulfilment in marriage.

Here we see the unmistakable reflection of that "courtly love" which is supposed to have originated with the poets of Provence, and which, popularized in Northern France by the troubadours, found its way into the work of Chrétien de Troies.

Arthur the glish ets 8

"Three extant songs of his (says Maynadier) are thoroughly in the spirit of the Provençal love lyrics. 'No one', he says in one of the songs, 'can know the first principle of love, who is not himself courtly and well informed:' -

'Nuls, s'il n'est cortois et sages,
Ne puet riens d'amors aprendre.'

These lines set forth the essence of the Provençal theory of love which became l'amour courtois of Northern France, that only a polished man of the world could be an ideal lover." These poets "represented love as something conventional, governed by

so many rules that spontaneous passion was hidden under an artificial system".

A curious book of the thirteenth century entitled Flos Amoris or De Arte Honeste Amandi presents a detailed elaboration of this system. Here we find some extraordinary observations on "The Art of Loving a la Mode" (as Maynadier translates the title), as e. g. that "on account of marriage no one is excused from being in love". On the authority of the Countess Marie de Champagne (who constituted in herself a sort of court of last resort in these matters), we learn too, that "true love between husband and wife was impossible, there was no credit in love to which people were bound by marriage vows, though there was credit in a love which, if detected, would cause danger and disgrace; nor was there uncertainty in the fixed condition of marriage, and uncertainty and jealousy were both necessary to true love".

Arthur of the English Poets 99

bid. 100

All this is so alien to the spirit of the twentieth century that it is, to us, quite incomprehensible. We have no sympathy with it ethically, socially or practically. Yet this miserable nonsense is nothing more nor less than the reductio ad absurdum of that quixotic cult which saw in every gentlewoman a fresh possibility of romantic adventure. If chivalry is to be judged by its fruits, it would seem that it here stands irrevocably condemned. The final verdict must, however, be modified by two considerations: (1) That it is unfair to judge an institution solely by the perversions which attend its development; (2) That the mutual relation of the sexes represents, after all, only one phase of chivalry, and affords therefore no adequate ground for sweeping condemnation.

Our discussion of Malory's women has thus far dealt almost exclusively with questions of love, marriage and sexual morality. The romantic element is indeed so dominant in their lives that it easily overshadows all else. But we must not therefore conclude that they knew no other interest. These women enjoyed large liberty, and their activities were correspondingly varied. They mingled without restraint in the daily life of the men at home; they not infrequently shared their adventures abroad. As a matter of fact, there was little in the whole range of the knightly calling which did not concern them directly or indirectly. The pages of Malory are thronged by multitudinous "maidens" who ride whither they will through field and forest. In the whole strange world of romance there is nothing more amazing than the ubiquity of these young women. It would seem indeed that the code of knighthood gave something like formal recognition to such errant damosels, and sought to guarantee their safety. For Sir Percivale rebukes the knights who demand that his sister submit to the custom of their castle. "Let her go,
I - 250 - - - ye be not wise, for a maid in what place she cometh is free." But whatever the theory, the custom of that castle cost that maid her life, despite three stalwart companions; and many another maid learned to her grief, that she was not free to ride unchallenged by evil men.

Yet on they move, in never-ending procession. Many of them are indeed driven forth by the cruel necessity of finding a champion, either for themselves or for those whom they hold dear. But this is by no means the only errand which induces them to leave the home shelter, and they often travel quite

unattended by others of their own sex. The tender maid of
I - 294 Astolat set out entirely alone in search of her beloved; and
I - 296 having found him wounded, she "never went from Sir Launcelot, but watched him day and night, and did - - - attendance to him". That her brother Lavaine was Launcelot's squire does not alter the fact that she was allowed to leave the paternal roof without
I - 272 companion or protector. Isoud was accompanied in all her wanderings by her faithful maid, Bragwaine; but the sole escort of
I - 372 many a lady was a dwarf, or perhaps a knight who had come more
I - 85 or less honestly by the right to call himself her champion.

Among these wanderers there are comparatively few married women. It would seem that the married woman acknowledged the lordship of her husband, and was not accustomed to travel far unless accompanied by him, or his representative. Queen Guen-
I - 38 ever once craved permission to attend a joust at which the king would not be present. "With right good will, said Arthur; for Sir Galahalt, the haut prince, shall have you in governance."

But if marriage vows imposed certain restraints upon a woman's liberty, they still allowed her wide latitude in social intercourse. Passing reference has already been made to the "extraordinary free behaviour of the unmarried ladies". But the "free behaviour" of the married ladies was at times hardly less
I - 45 extraordinary. We read that Guenever openly embraced Sir Lamorak in congratulating him upon his exploits at Surluse; that Isoud
- 119 welcomed Launcelot in like manner to Joyous Gard; that Isoud
- 96 was nothing loth to accept the advances of an unknown knight in
- 368 the forest; and strangest of all, that Launcelot was permitted, in Arthur's very presence, to kiss Guenever in farewell on the

day when he was banished from England because of his guilty love for her.

The offices performed by women, usually maidens, show a surprisingly wide range. Young women were employed as confi-
- 16-17 dential letter-carriers, even between points as far removed from one another as the court of King Mark of Cornwall and the Court of King Arthur. In time of war they served as despatch-
- 372 bearers. Sir Launcelot sent "a damosel and a dwarf with her, requiring King Arthur to leave his warring upon his lands", and the damosel was received in a manner which indicated that there was nothing strange or unusual in this procedure. Skill in the art of healing was apparently not uncommon among women. This it was which first led Sir Tristram both to Isoud of Ire-
- 250 land and to Isoud of Brittany. The former is described as "a
- 289 noble surgeon", and to the latter he was sent, as to the only one capable of healing a certain poisoned wound. Not a few noble ladies also attained proficiency in the realm of magic. Among these the names of Morgan le Fay and Dame Brisen are noto-
- 282 rious, while Nimue, the Lady of the Lake, "did great goodness unto King Arthur and to all his knights through sorcery and enchantments". Pious gentlewomen sometimes became hermits, and enjoyed the same reverential respect which was accorded to "holy men". Such e. g. was that aunt of Sir Percivale who informed him of his mother's death, though time had been when, as "Queen
- 193 of the Waste Lands", she "was called the queen of most riches in the world". In the course of every day-life high-bred maidens stooped to lowly service of various sorts. No less a personage
- 156 than the daughter of King Bagdemagus served Launcelot's meals

when he was a prisoner in the castle of Morgan le Fay; and she it was who enabled him to effect his escape. There seems to have been no prejudice against familiar intercourse between young gentlewomen and errant knights, and the friendship of the ladies proved, on occasion, a valuable asset to others beside Sir Launcelot.

It is scarcely necessary to pursue this subject further. There can be no question that chivalry defined the sphere of woman in generous terms; but it is equally unmistakable that it permitted liberty and license to go hand in hand. The theoretical position which it accorded to woman was eminently high and honorable; but between its theory and its practice the connection was very remote. The facts of the case would seem to indicate that the chivalric ideal regarding woman was a sort of self-sufficient fetish which knew neither end nor aim outside itself. Hence the knight or lady who rendered it due homage in the abstract, need feel no serious obligation to translate it into life. From this fundamental inconsistency there is no escape.

The net result of the chivalric system is then distinctly disappointing in this particular realm. The most that can be claimed for it is the inculcation of certain lofty ideals which it failed to render effective in conduct. If there be any superior moral vitality in chivalry, it is not to be found here. We may still seek it in the intercourse of knight with knight; we must clearly abandon the search in the intercourse of knight with lady.

CHAPTER VI.

The Making of a Knight.

"'O mother,
How can ye keep me tether'd to you? - Shame.
Man am I grown, a man's work must I do.
Follow the deer? Follow the Christ, the King,
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King -
Else, wherefore born?'"

(Tennyson: Gareth and Lynette 113-118.)

The study of the preceding chapter has proved chivalry to be morally defective in at least one important aspect. In so far as it purported to revere and exalt woman it has been weighed and found wanting. Though every sword was dedicated to her service, her preeminence was of a purely romantic nature. Deference to gentlewomen was prescribed by knightly etiquette, but for want of adequate motive it commonly lacked depth, if not sincerity. Chivalry was, in short, a distinctly masculine institution, and the woman's share in it was a sorry one at best. An uncertain protection against dangers with which she could not cope in person, a little empty honor of a more or less genuine sort - these were her recompense for lonely days and sleepless nights. It mattered not how many
- 139 sons she bore. The splendid monster chivalry demanded every one. When the mother of Sir Percivale and Sir Aglovale made her pathetic plea that they "abide at home" with her, Sir

Percivale replied with a simple statement of the obligation laid upon them by their princely rank: "Ah, sweet mother, - - we may not, for we be come of king's blood of both parties, and therefore, mother, it is our kind to haunt arms and noble deeds."

In every man-child of noble birth, society recognized an incipient knight. For a high-born youth there was no other conceivable career. Distinction in arms was his own consuming ambition, as it was the goal of his whole education. To yeoman and churls belonged the less picturesque work of the world.

It must, however, be borne in mind that knighthood was not necessarily dependent on heredity. It was possible for a young man of humble birth to enter its circle, provided he showed fitting qualifications. But even so, he could not hope
- 201 to attain equal footing with those "to the manner born". "Of what kin is he come?" asked Dame Liones, when informed of the approach of a champion to maintain her cause. This was the spontaneous question that greeted the stranger knight wherever he went. Sooner or later he must face it, though he might for a time conceal his identity; and low birth was an undeniable
Cf.
- 75 handicap. There was a deep-seated idea that meanness of birth
- 79 necessarily implied meanness of spirit; there were adventures
Cf.
- 47-48 that could be achieved only by the noble-born; and there were haughty knights who, at least at times, refused to enter the
I-245 lists against a social inferior.

The case of Sir Tor is of peculiar interest in this con-
- 73 nection. On the occasion of King Arthur's wedding feast, "there came a poor man into the court and brought with him a fair

young man of eighteen years of age riding upon a lean mare". Pleading the king's promise to grant that day any reasonable request, the father prayed that his son might be made a knight. "It is a great thing thou asketh of me, said the king." But he proceeded to make further inquiry. The man proved to be a cow-herd sorely puzzled by an untractable child. For of the thirteen sons bestowed upon him by a generous Providence, only one had caused him any trouble. "This child will not labour for me, for anything that my wife or I may do, but always he will be shooting or casting darts, and glad for to see battles and to behold knights, and always day and night he desireth of me to be made a knight."

Having asked his name "the king beheld him fast, and saw he was passingly well-visaged and passingly well made of his years". But before rendering a decision Arthur wished to see the twelve other boys. They were summoned "and all were shaped
- 73-'4 much like the poor man. But Tor was not like none of them all in shape nor in countenance, for he was much more than any of them." Tor's case was won. Having ascertained that the lad had brought with him the sword wherewith he should be knighted,
- 74 the king bade him: "Take it out of the sheath - - - and require me to make you a knight."

"Then Tor alit off his mare and pulled out his sword, kneeling, and requiring the king that he would make him knight, and that he might be a knight of the Table Round. As for a knight I will make you, and therewith smote him in the neck with the sword, saying, Be ye a good knight, and so I pray to God so ye may be, and if ye be of prowess and of

worthiness ye shall be of the Table Round." Such was the ceremony which set upon any an older stripling the seal of knighthood.

When Tor first entered Arthur's presence he was, to all intents and purposes, the son of Aries, the cow-herd. But did Arthur believe him such when he knighted him? Almost certainly, no! The youth had nothing in common with his supposed father, and investigation proved him to be as strikingly unlike all his brothers. In "shape", "size", "countenance" and disposition, he had an individuality of his own. More than that, his instincts and predilections were unmistakably those of a scion of some noble house whose chief employ was that of arms. The same passion for knightly deeds possessed him which appeared in Beaumains, the king's son, who "endured"
- 183 for a full twelvemonth as a "boy of the kitchen" at Arthur's court. "But ever when that he was any jousting of knights, that would he see an he might." The young Beaumains had come a stranger to the assembly of the Round Table, desiring of the king three gifts. When his request was granted, he asked as the first only "meat and drink" for one year. The other two he preferred to specify at the expiration of that time. But the first was sufficient to brand him in Sir Kay's
- 182 estimation: "I dare undertake he is a villain born, and never will make man, for an he had come of gentlemen he would have asked of you horse and armour, but such as he is, he asketh."

Kay's method of reasoning is a common one throughout the Morte Darthur, though it more frequently assumes a converse form. To judge the tree by its fruit was held to be both safe

and legitimate. It seems clear that Arthur applied this principle to Tor's case. He knew too well the customs of errant knights to find anything surprising in Merlin's subsequent revelation that the young man was, in reality, son to
- 74 King Pellinore.

The question naturally arises whether many, or most, of the "poor men" who rose to knighthood were, like Tor, of mixed gentle and lowly blood. There is much to suggest that this was probably true, but we have no data to prove it. The high renown achieved by Tor does indeed set him apart from the majority of this class. It would seem that in course of time his fellows forgave, and well-nigh forgot, the fact that his mother was a milk-maid. Yet so strong was the prejudice against humble blood, that the king could with difficulty admit the evidence of his own senses, when King Pellinore urged the boy's
- 96 right to a place at the Round Table. "By my head, said Arthur - - - I have seen him proved, but he sayeth little and he doth more, for I know none in all this court an he were as well born on his mother's side as he is on your side, that is like him of prowess and of might."

The king's amazement at the exploits of Sir Tor was not altogether unwarranted. As a cowherd's son he could have known nothing of that systematic training for knighthood which every high-born youth received as a matter of course. He lacked, therefore, both background and technical education for his new calling. In so far as the same was true of other low-born knights, it is not strange that those of noble blood found it difficult to recognize them as peers. How elaborate the

young aristocrat's training might be, is well illustrated in the case of Sir Tristram. His education was perhaps uncommonly broad, but we may assume that it is a fair example of training for knighthood at its best.

- 240 As a child Tristram narrowly escaped death at the hands of a jealous step-mother. When the woman's plot to poison him
- 242 was exposed, he himself interceded for her, and she "loved him ever after". But the boy's father still feared her, and to
- 241-2 put him beyond her reach, he sent him to France "to learn the language, and nurture, and deeds of arms".

- 242 "And then when he well could speak the language, and had learned all that he might learn in that country, he came home to his father, King Meliodas, again. And so Tristram learned to be an harper passing all other, that there was none such called in no country, and so on harping and on instruments of music he applied him in his youth for to learn. And after, as he growed in might and strength, he laboured ever in hunting and in hawking, so that never gentleman more, that ever we heard read of. - - - Thus Sir Tristram endured in Cornwall until he was big and strong, of the age of nineteen years."

Though Tristram was of royal blood, he apparently left
- 241 his father's court with but one attendant. This was "a gentleman that was well learned and taught", who remained with him during the seven years that he spent in France. Thus he enjoyed that intimate contact with an experienced knight which was to many a youth an education in itself. The science of arms a boy might learn by rote and practice, the subtler refinements of the chivalric code he could grasp only indirect-

ly as he saw them exemplified in life. So clearly was this understood that every good knight recognized his obligation to share in the training of youth, and ambitious young men frequently committed themselves to gratuitous service under those who had won special distinction.

In the relationship between seasoned knights and raw recruits we see chivalry at its best. Here is strength condescending to weakness with a magnanimity that robs condescension of its sting. Tennyson has given exquisite expression to this spirit, in Arthur's assent to Gareth's plea, that he might be knighted without disclosing his name to any save Launcelot:

reth
nd
ette
-572

> "So with a kindly hand on Gareth's arm
> Smiled the great King, and half unwillingly
> Loving his lusty youthhood yielded to him.
> Then, after summoning Lancelot privily:
> 'I have given him the first quest; he is not proven.
> Look therefore, when he calls for this in hall,
> Thou get to horse and follow him far away.
> Cover the lions on thy shield, and see,
> Far as thou mayest, he be nor ta'en nor slain.'"

In the truly great knights of maturer years there was always a peculiar solicitude for the young and inexperienced; and in Launcelot, the greatest of them all, this trait was most conspicuous. His kindness drew to him the love of young men, as surely as his marvellous deeds compelled their admiration. Lavaine, who long served as his squire, was held a willing slave by an affection which knew no bounds. That his sister Elaine found life intolerable without Sir Launcelot was quite comprehensible to the boy. "She doth as I do (he

- 303 testified to his father), for sithen I first saw my lord Sir Launcelot, I could never depart from him, nor nought I will

an I may follow him."

The friendship between Sir Launcelot and the young Beaumains affords an ideal picture of maturity and wisdom, in the service of youth and inexperience. The story of Beaumains' first year at court is indeed rich in manifold significance. The very presence of the mysterious guest in the kitchen became a touchstone which revealed the essential character of more than one proud knight. Sir Kay, the mocker, tortured him with scorn and sneers, never suspecting that it was his own mean spirit which he saw reflected in his victim. Sir
183 Launcelot, the noble, won the lad's heart by many a gracious word and deed, and "that as Sir Launcelot did was of his great gentleness and courtesy". But the day came when Sir Kay bullied his "boy of the kitchen" for the last time. The year of Beaumains' humiliation was past and he rode forth in gorgeous accoutrements from Arthur's hall. Scornful still, his persecutor followed with a taunting challenge to combat - and received his deserts. The encounter was short and de-
185 cisive. "Sir Kay fell down as he had been dead; and he (Beaumains) alit down and took Sir Kay's shield and his spear, and start upon his own horse and rode his way. - - - And all
186 men scorned Sir Kay, and in especial Sir Gawaine and Sir Launcelot said it was not his part to rebuke no young man, for full little knew he of what birth he is come, and for what cause he came to this court."

Sir Launcelot's own treatment of Beaumains never swerved from the courtesy due to a gentleman. When the boy, as yet unknighted, set forth on his first quest, Launcelot quietly

followed at his bidding; and then, flushed with his victory over Sir Kay, the stripling proposed to measure himself against the greatest of earthly knights, Sir Launcelot gravely accepted his challenge. The fierce combat which ensued is of more than common interest.

It is evident that the animus that lay back of Beaumains' fight with Sir Kay was altogether lacking in this with Sir Launcelot. In the former, the lad saw his opportunity to avenge the insults of a hated enemy; in this, he directed
Cf. - 67 his attack against his best friend. Such "battles in love" were of frequent occurrence, whether for honor, or from sheer exuberance of spirits; and while they lasted, they differed in no way from battles "in wrath". Serious injury was quite possible under such circumstances, though a fatal outcome was not to be anticipated.

- 185 As Beaumains rode against Sir Launcelot, the onslaught was so vigorous that "either bare down other to the earth, and sore were they bruised. Then Sir Launcelot arose and helped him from his horse. And then Beaumains threw his shield from him, and proffered to fight with Sir Launcelot on foot."

Launcelot's acceptance of this second challenge was by no means a matter of course. He could but realize that he was fighting with no ordinary antagonist, and he knew full well that the odds would now be against him. When the newly
- 303 knighted Sir La Cote Male Taile had suffered falls from Sir Ploberis and Sir Palomides, his challenge to fight on foot was promptly rejected by those doughty knights. Sir Mordred's comment on this episode makes clear the full signifi-

cance of Launcelot's generosity to Beaumains.

305-'6 "By my head, - - - he is a good knight - - ; but as yet he may not yet sit sure on horseback, for he that shall be a good horseman it must come of usage and exercise. But when he cometh to the strokes of his sword he is then noble and mighty, and that saw Sir Blioberis and Sir Palomides, for wit ye well they are wily men of arms, and anon they know when they see a young knight by his riding, how they are sure to give him a fall from his horse or a great buffet. But for the most part they will not light on foot with young knights, for they are wight and strongly armed. - - - For often I have seen the old proved knights rebuked and slain by them that were but young beginners."

Sir Launcelot found, indeed, that this fight with Beaumains bid fair to compromise his reputation if too long con-

- 185 tinued. He "had so much ado with him that he dread himself to be shamed, and said, Beaumains, fight not so sore, your quarrel and mine is not so great but we may leave off. Truly that is truth, said Beaumains, but it doth me good to feel your might, and yet, my lord, I showed not the utterance. In God's name, said Sir Launcelot, for I promise you, by the faith of my body, I had as much to do as I might to save myself from you unshamed, and therefore have ye no doubt of none earthly knight." Thus ungrudgingly did the great Launcelot confess the prowess of his young friend; and thus did he teach him the true spirit of that knighthood which he was about to confer upon him.

The story of Beaumains and Launcelot is not the only one

which shows how boy knights learned the meaning of chivalry
- 311 from their elders. Sir La Cote Male Taile found in Sir Plenorius an antagonist so formidable that, at the end of two hours' fighting, he was so "forwounded and - - - forbled he might not stand". But his magnanimous conqueror reassured him: "Fair young knight, dismay you not, for had ye been fresh when ye met with me, as I was, I wot well that I should not have endured so long as ye have done; and therefore for your noble deeds of arms I shall show to you kindness and gentleness in all that I may. And forthwithal this noble knight, Sir Plenorius, took him up in his arms, and led him into his tower. And then he commanded him the wine, and made to search him and to stop his bleeding wounds."

So by example, as well as by precept, young men were educated for the high calling of knighthood. It is plain that they entered upon its duties with widely varying technical attainments. Sir Tristram was thoroughly versed in all that belonged to the science of arms; Sir Tor knew only so much as an eager boy could gather by observation. Yet both alike were received into the knightly fraternity. What then were the requirements for admission to its ranks?

There appears to have been no definite rule regarding the age of candidates for knighthood. We have seen that Sir Tor was knighted at the age of eighteen, and that Sir Tristram was already nineteen when he received that honor. But we read of other new-made knights who were younger by several years. Helin le Blank was scarce fifteen years old when his father, Sir Bors, took him from his mother. His grandfather did,

- 156 indeed, make a feeble protest: "Ye may well take him with you, but he is over tender of age" - and "there was made great sorrow for the departing of Helin le Blank, and great weeping was there made". But when King Arthur learned that the lad just arrived at Camelot was really son to Sir Bors, he "let him
- 156 make knight of the Round Table". Sir Galahad, too, became a knight when hardly more than a child. Yet it would seem, from the words of his mother, that he had reached the accepted
- 157 age for assuming a man's responsibilities: "My lord, Sir Launcelot, said Dame Elaine, at this same feast of Pentecost shall your son and mine, Galahad, be made knight, for he is fully now fifteen winter old."

As a matter of fact the requirements for knighthood were few and simple. High birth and thorough training were desirable but not imperative. The absolute essentials seem to have been no more than three in number, viz. fitness of body, fitness of spirit, and active desire for a knightly career.

It is self-evident that there was no place for the physical weakling in the ranks of chivalry. We can but conjecture the sorry estate of a noble youth unblessed with an athletic body and a sound constitution. He must have been a constant source of chagrin, both to himself and to all who owned kinship with him. For the romancer such as these had, indeed, no existence. A judgment based solely on the pages of the Morte Darthur might lead to the conclusion that manly beauty and phenomenal strength were the universal prerogatives of gentle birth.

When the young Breunor le Noire, a grotesquely clothed stranger, besought Arthur to make him knight, Sir Lamorak and
- 300 Sir Gaheris advised that his request be granted: "For him beseemeth well of person and of countenance, that he shall prove a good man, and a good knight, and a mighty; for, sir, an ye be remembered, even such one was Sir Launcelot du Lake when he came first into this court." Beaumains was "the goodliest
- 181 young man and the fairest that ever they all saw, and he was large and long and broad in the shoulders, and well visaged, and the fairest and the largest handed that ever man saw".
- 164 The boy Galahad was "passing fair and well made, that unnethe in the world men might not find his match". Such was the splendid raw material of which knights were made. The finished product of chivalry, the knight in his prime, is well represented by Sir Palomides, at the time when he reached the
- 79 Red City to revenge the death of King Hermance. "They beheld him, and saw that he was well made, cleanly and bigly, and unmaimed of his limbs, and neither too young nor too old. And so all the people praised him."

If any system was ever calculated to insure the survival of the physically fittest, that system was chivalry. But fitness implied more than mere bodily bulk and muscular strength. These could avail little unless reinforced by hardiness of spirit and courage, both moral and physical. To jeopard his life in some perilous quest was the first duty of the new-made knight, and if he shrank from this, his doom was already sealed. For chivalry gave no quarter to a coward at any stage of his career.

The third requirement for admission to knighthood was hardly more than a corollary to the other two, especially to the second. Given the chivalric social order, it is inconceivable that any young man of vigorous body and high spirit could fail of the desire to find his place in quest and tilt and tournament. Yet it was apparently deemed necessary to insure the knightly ranks against unwilling recruits. Though Aries had explicitly declared that "to be made a knight" was Tor's one consuming desire, Arthur was satisfied with nothing short of the boy's own direct request. And Launcelot particularly questioned the nuns on this point in the case of Galahad: "Cometh this desire of himself? He and they all said yea."

The very fact that any youth could tolerate the intervention of a third party in this matter may have seemed a suspicious circumstance. The candidate for knighthood ordinarily spoke for himself with an impetuosity which left no doubt regarding either his wishes or his spirit. "Sir, if ye will give me the order of knighthood, I will do battle with Sir Marhaus," said Tristram, when King Mark could find no other to dispute that knight's insolent demands. "Grant me to have this adventure of the damosel, for it belongeth unto me," prayed Beaumains, inflamed by a maiden's plea for a champion for her sister. And Griflet besought the king "for all the service that he had done him to give him the order of knighthood", that he might respond to a squire's call for a knight to avenge his master's death.

Though admission to knighthood was not dependent on blood, it seems to have been customary to require a youth to declare his identity before conferring that honor upon him. "Then must ye tell me your name - - - and of what kin ye be born," replied

Launcelot, when Beaumains begged of him the order of knighthood. The young man's prowess soon roused curiosity regarding his
- 208 birth, and Sir Launcelot gave assurance that he was "of a full noble blood. - - It seemeth by you, said King Arthur, that ye know his name and from whence he is come, and of what blood he is. I suppose I do so, said Launcelot, or else I would not have
- 179 given him the order of knighthood." Even so Sir Galahad asked
- 245 Melias his name and his kindred, King Mark asked Tristram his
- 73 name and his birthplace, and King Arthur asked Tor his name.
- 165 Launcelot appears to have waived this point when he knighted Galahad, but the case of Galahad was in every way exceptional.

There is in the ceremony of knighting something distinctly suggestive of the christening of a child. As the one typifies adoption into the Christian church, so the other signifies formal admission to the ranks of knighthood. In both cases there is like insistence upon the name; in both, the rite closes with something of the nature of a blessing, which is half prayer, half
. pp. & 120 exhortation; and between the young knight and the elder, who conferred his knighthood, there remains through life a relationship closely akin to that between a child and his godfather.

It is only in exceptional instances that Malory describes the actual ceremony which conferred knighthood. Only in the knighting of Tor is the picture fairly complete. In other fragmentary descriptions the closing words of prayer or exhortation do not always appear, but we find them frequently enough to convince us that they formed an integral part of the rite. "God
- 165 make him a good man (prayed Launcelot, as he knighted Galahad), for of beauty faileth you not as any that liveth." Galahad, in

- 179 his turn, exhorted Melias: "Now, fair sir, - - - sith that ye be come of kings and queens, now look that knighthood be well set in you, for ye ought to be a mirror unto all chivalry."

We may note one further point of interest in connection with the making of a knight. It would seem that either party to the ceremony was in custom, if not in duty, bound to grant the first reasonable request of the other. For Arthur says
- 39 to Griflet: "Now - - - sith I have made you knight thou must give me a gift," and so requires a promise that he will return to court after the forthcoming joust; and Melias says to Gala-
- 179 had: "But, sir, sithen ye have made me a knight, ye must of right grant me my first desire that is reasonable," and so obtains permission to ride as his companion until some adventure shall part them.

Every new-made knight stood on the border of an ardently desired Promised Land. However young he might be, he had long dwelt there in imagination, his thoughts playing about its marvellous adventures, his ambitions centering in its golden opportunities. He now looked eagerly forward to the realization of his dreams. But he soon found that he had much to learn. His new citizenship involved duties as well as privileges, and if he would win distinction, he must, at the outset, master a complicated code of honor. What then were its ideals? what the service that it expected of him?

CHAPTER VII.

Fundamentals of the Knightly Ideal.

"'My knights are sworn to vows
Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,
And loving, utter faithfulness in love,
And uttermost obedience to the King.'"

(Tennyson: Gareth and Lynette 541-544.)

- 299 At a certain tournament "upon All Hallowmass Day, beside Winchester," Sir Gareth overthrew thirty knights. When this extraordinary achievement was reported to Sir Launcelot, it drew from him a glowing tribute of praise:

- 301 "By my head, said Sir Launcelot, he is a noble knight, and a mighty man and well breathed; and if he were well essayed, said Sir Launcelot, I would deem he were good enough for any knight that beareth the life; and he is a gentle knight, courteous, true, and bounteous, meek, and mild, and in him is no manner of mal engyn, but plain, faithful, and true."

We have here a sort of compendium of all knightly virtue. Nothing of real importance is omitted, and seeming redundancies of expression serve to fix the emphasis where emphasis is due. This eulogy affords, indeed, an excellent working outline for a study of the fundamentals of the knightly ideal. It falls naturally into two sections, the first dealing primarily with physical prowess, the second, with

moral excellence. There is, however, no sharp line of demarcation between the two. Sir Launcelot's wager that "if he were well essayed - - - he were good enough for any knight that beareth the life", implies intrepedity of spirit, as well as power of body. We have already seen that these were prerequisites to a knightly career; but brute strength and brute courage combined were inadequate for the attainment of the highest knightly fame. Supreme distinction fell only to him whose nobility of character lent added lustre to his deeds. It is noteworthy that Sir Launcelot enumerates Sir Gareth's virtues in detail, while contenting himself with a mere preliminary mention of his physical superiority. Let us then pass immediately to the second, more definite, division of his eulogy.

We find here eight descriptive adjectives (one of which occurs twice) and one comprehensive negative clause. Of these eight adjectives, five or six have to do with characteristics of disposition and manners: Sir Gareth is gentle, meek, mild, bounteous and courteous. The remaining two or three represent essentially moral qualities (or phases of a single quality): he is faithful, true - and "plain". The last word is somewhat ambiguous in its bearing, but it apparently belongs to neither group exclusively. It seems to indicate a certain native simplicity in this youth which would imply, on the one hand, straightforward and unaffected dealing with his fellowmen, on the other, sincerity and transparency of character. The repetition of the word <u>true</u> sounds the key-note of the knightly ethics. The same, or a closely analagous, idea

appears again in the word faithful, and is yet further rein-
ossary forced by the phrase no manner of mal engyn, i.e. "evil craft". Thus we see that five of Sir Launcelot's ten specifications in the second half of his eulogy, are directly concerned with the one virtue, truth (fidelity, etc.).

A similar emphasis prevails throughout the Morte Darthur. In the early days of Sir Gareth's knighthood, Queen Guenever
· 220 pays tribute to his integrity: "Ever sithin he was grown he was marvellously witted, and ever he was faithful and true to his promise." When the outraged Mark slew Sir Tristram from behind, Sir Launcelot's guilty conscience filled him with
· 349 apprehension. But Sir Bors reassured him: "There is one thing shall courage you and us all, ye know well King Arthur and King Mark were never like of conditions, for there was never yet man could prove King Arthur untrue to his promise". Merlin found it sufficient praise to designate a certain
· 51 youth as "a passing good knight of prowess and a full true
· 106 man"; and Arthur promised signal favor to Sir Ontzlake "because ye are named a good knight, and full of prowess, and true and gentle in all your deeds".

If the supremacy of truth (fidelity, etc.) were not fully established by direct proof, there is available much supplementary evidence of an indirect nature. Such words as traitor, treachery, treason, guile, false, felonious, occur with a frequency that leaves no possible doubt as to the vice most hateful to chivalry. We have seen that the Round Table
· 89 knights were solemnly warned "always to flee treason"; and none failed to heed this admonition save on peril of his honor,

or even of his life. The knight who stooped to treachery invited the scorn of all his fellows, and at the same time, disqualified himself for more than one important adventure. A damosel once came to Arthur's court, hoping for deliverance
- 46 from a great sword, with which she was girt; but it could be drawn from its scabbard only by "a passing good man of his hands and of his deeds, and without villainy or treachery,
- 70 and without treason". "Merlin let make a bridge - - - but half a foot broad, and there shall never man pass that bridge, nor have hardiness to go over, but if he were a passing good man and a good knight without treachery or villainy." King Hermance, dying by the hands of those whom he had befriended,
- 76 found consolation in the assurance: "There shall some good knight have pity on me to revenge my death, for there was never king nor lord falslier nor traitorlier slain than I am here to my death".

Treachery is beyond question the one unpardonable sin among Malory's knights. The only other vice which is in any degree comparably obnoxious to them, is the almost inevitable concomitant of treachery. Cowardice is universally despised - the coward is both hated and feared. Sir Launcelot, when on the way to rescue Queen Guenever from the power of Meliagrance,
- 320 found himself attacked by archers in ambush. "Alas for shame, said Launcelot, that ever one knight should betray another knight; but it is an old saw, A good man is never in danger, but when he is in the danger of a coward." Sir Breuse Saunce
- 59 Pité, a notorious miscreant, was once betrayed, by a guilty conscience, into a most accurate description of himself and

his kind. Fleeing from Sir Pleoberis, who threatened him with well-deserved punishment, he encountered three other knights of the Round Table. His only hope lay in dissimulation. He accordingly "rode straight unto them - - - and prayed them of rescues. - - - Ah, fair knights, said Sir Breuse, here followeth me the most traitor knight, and most coward, and most of villainy; his name is Breuse Saunce Pite, and if he may get me he will slay me without mercy and pity". The knightly scorn of cowardice is perfectly expressed by Sir Tristram, on the occasion of his first jousts. Sir Marhaus, fatally wounded, fled from the field. "And when Sir
- 248 Tristram saw Sir Marhaus withdraw him, he said: Ah! sir knight of the Round Table, why withdrawest thou thee? thou dost thyself and thy kin great shame, for I am but a young knight, or now I was never proved, and rather than I should withdraw me from thee, I had rather be hewn in an hundred pieces."

The extreme prominence given to cowardice as a vice, might naturally lead to the question why valor is so seldom extolled as a virtue. It is a fact that we do not find it explicitly named in the knightly encomiums of the Morte Darthur, but this omission is easily explained. Valor is so patently a sine qua non of all success in the employ of chivalry, that particular mention of it seems superfluous.
70-47- Such common expressions as good knight, noble knight, clean
106-238 knight, true man, good of prowess, well-ruled, would be meaningless if they did not imply bravery of a high order. The fact that a knight is singled out for any praise is

sufficient guarantee of his valor.

Sir Launcelot credits Sir Gareth with certain virtues which fall into a category by themselves. He declares him to be gentle, courteous, bounteous, meek, and mild. With one or two possible exceptions, these are words strangely at variance with our usual conception of knightly character. Knowing Sir Gareth to have been an especially lovable youth, we might easily conclude that this description was personal to him, rather than typical of knighthood. But a little study will prove the falsity of this assumption. Sir Launcelot is blessed and eulogized by a damosel to whom he has done ser-
- 165-6 vice: "Almighty Jesu preserve you wheresomever ye ride or go, for the curtiest knight thou art, and meekest, unto all ladies and gentlewomen that now liveth." The loyal subjects
- 75 of the dead King Hermance declare to Palomides: "So kind a king and knight had never the rule of poor people as he was; and by cause of his goodness and gentleness we bemoan him,
- 111 and ever shall." And Sir Tristram was "so kind and so gentle", that separation from him was a genuine grief to Sir Palomides.

It would seem somewhat difficult to reconcile these passive and friendly virtues with the sterner traits of the professional fighting-man. Yet the former are no less essential to the ideal knightly character than the latter. So important are they (in theory, at least), that they fall into abeyance only when their exercise would entail neglect of duty, or the appearance of cowardice. It is said of
- 87 Brian of the Isles that "he is full loth to do wrong, and

full loth to fight with any man, but if he be sore sought on, so that for shame he may not leave it". It must, however, be acknowledged that this is an extreme case. So numerous were the circumstances which either required, or permitted, a resort to arms, that the average knightly career was a stormy one. Yet even so the gentler virtues found large scope both on, and off, the field of battle. Preeminent among them all stands courtesy - the mark of fine breeding in every age. When the damosel Linet discovered that the poise of the young Beaumains was impervious to all her gibes, scorn
I - 197 gave way to admiration. "O Jesu, marvel have I, said the damosel, what manner a man ye be, for it may never be otherwise but that ye be come of a noble blood, for so foul nor shamefully did never woman rule a knight as I have done you, and ever courteously ye have suffered me, and that came never but of a gentle blood."

Perhaps the knight of lowly birth labored under no greater disadvantage than his untutored instinct, and lack of experience, in the realm of courtesy. For the courtesy of chivalry was a highly cultivated flower of the spirit, not a code of external manners to be donned as a garment by any chance comer. It involved both largeness of soul and refinement of feeling. The truly courteous knight was not he who had mastered an elaborate etiquette, but he who had mastered himself, and whose own intuition was his safe and constant guide. Lacking this inward monitor, he could never hope to fulfill the whole law of courtesy. How wide was its
f. p. 118 range and how deep its meaning will appear more perfectly as

we study its implications in the succeeding chapter.

We may now note in passing that Malory's knights knew no dividing line between courtesy and generosity. The one was to them the natural outgrowth of the other. When Sir Launcelot described Sir Gareth as gentle, courteous, and bounteous, he covered the whole field of generosity. Bounteousness toward inferiors and dependents was reckoned a great virtue, but this, of itself, was not enough. The knightly life gave ample play to another phase of generosity, viz. mercy toward the defeated and helpless. It will be remembered that the king
- 89-90 charged his knights in the beginning - - - "by no means to be cruel, but to give mercy unto him that asketh mercy, upon pain of forfeiture of their worship and lordship of King Arthur for evermore". Yet Sir Gawaine disobeyed this injunction before
I - 78 the end of his first quest. And bitterly did he rue it! For an untoward accident caused him to slay a lady instead of the knight to whom he had refused mercy, and his fellows of the Round Table regarded him with horror. "Alas, said Gaheris, that is foully and shamefully done, that shame shall never from you; also ye should give mercy unto them that ask mercy, for a knight without mercy is without worship." And other
I - 79 knights came who "assailed Sir Gawaine hard, and said unto him, Thou new-made knight, thou hast shamed thy knighthood, for a knight without mercy is dishonoured".

The generous spirit of chivalry appears again in the all but universal impulse to succor the distressed. The story of Sir Urre of Hungary is significant in this connection, and affords, too, an admirable glimpse of that strangest

of all knightly virtues, humility. Sir Urre was brought to Arthur's court, suffering from grievous wounds which could be
- 333 healed only when "the best knight of the world had searched" them. King Arthur promised that he and his court would do their utmost in his behalf. "And for to give all other men of worship courage, I myself will essay to handle your son (he says to Sir Urre's mother) - - - , not presuming upon me that I am so worthy to heal your son by my deeds, but I will courage other men of worship to do as I will do." More than a hundred knights followed his example, but without avail.
- 336 Then the king called upon Sir Launcelot, but "Jesu defend me, said Sir Launcelot, when so many kings and knights have essayed and failed, that I should presume upon me to achieve that all ye, my lords, might not achieve". But the king insisted and he could but obey. Though protesting, "Never was I able in worthiness to do so high a thing," he humbly prayed to Father, Son and Holy Ghost for healing power - "by thy great virtue and grace of thee, but, good lord, never
e Arthur of myself". And when success crowned his efforts "Sir
of the Launcelot wept as he had been a child that had been beaten".
glish Poets 235 Maynadier remarks of Launcelot in this connection: "With all his prowess, he has that virtue of humility which his son Galahad lacked." Was it, perchance, this lack which caused Galahad's failure, on this occasion, to prove himself "the best knight of the world"? We know only that he tried in vain to heal Sir Urre's wounds.

There is abundant evidence that magnanimity and kind-

liness were held to be essential to true greatness. Deficiency on these lines implied a moral lack, for which the most distinguished physical prowess afforded no adequate compensation. Queen Guenever voices the knightly scorn of
11-'12 envy in the following vigorous terms: "An it happeth an envious man once to win worship he shall be dishonoured twice therefor; and for this cause all men of worship hate an envious man, and will show him no favour, and he that is courteous, and kind, and gentle, hath favour in every place." And against greed, so closely allied to envy, Arthur explicit-
- 90 ly warns his knights - "that no man take no battles in a wrongful quarrel for no law, nor for no world's goods".

A detailed study of the eulogies scattered through the Morte Darthur would throw many interesting side-lights on the knightly ideal. The very frequent use of the word clean
47 II- is significant. Such phrases as clean knight, clene knight-
106
9 -162 hood, cleanly and bigly made, clene confessed, clenest mighted
- 69 occur at every turn. Sir Bagdemagus finds favor as a "good
- 96 liver", and Sir Tor is praised as one who "sayeth little and
- 278 - - - doth more". Arthur is called "the most christened"
II-79 man of the world", and Sir Palomides is repeatedly commended as "correct in belief", though an unchristened Saracen.
II-69 Certain knights, on the other hand, are condemned as "murderers" or "destroyers of good knights", and one even as a wilful
II-16 persecutor of the weaker sex. Sir Launcelot challenges the
- 165 latter: "O thou false knight and traitor unto knighthood, who did learn thee to distress ladies and gentlewomen?"

The knightly ideal as regarded women would require

further consideration here, if it had not been treated at length in the preceding chapter. Chivalry cherished a profound theoretical respect both for chastity, and for faithfulness in love. But these ideals must be accepted with serious modification, if admitted to be practically operative at all in the knightly scheme of life. We believe that we have proved that immorality was not really offensive to Malory's knights, and that their love was seldom enduring, unless it were illicit.

The closing scene of the Morte Darthur is one of exquisite pathos. Sir Launcelot lies dead in the castle of Joyous Gard, and beside his bier stands Sir Ector de Maris, the brother who has sought him for seven long years. Overwhelmed by grief, Sir Ector pays tribute to the great departed. Love lends him eloquence, and in a eulogy of surpassing beauty, he recalls each virtue which adorned the name of Launcelot.

II - 400 "Ah Launcelot, he said, thou were head of all Christian knights, and now I dare say, said Sir Ector, thou Sir Launcelot, there thou liest, that thou were never matched of earthly knight's hand. And thou were the courteoust knight that ever bare shield. And thou were the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrad horse. And thou were the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman. And thou were the kindest man that ever struck with sword. And thou were the goodliest person that ever came among press of knights. And thou was the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies. And thou were the sternest knight to thy

mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest."

Here is the very ideal of chivalry - Sir Launcelot's greatness and goodness, without Sir Launcelot's weakness. The dross being burned away, the residue is pure gold.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Knightly Calling.

"'O King, for thou hast driven the foe without,
See to the foe within! bridge, ford, beset
By bandits, every one that owns a tower
The lord for half a league. Why sit ye there?'

- -

'Comfort thyself,' said Arthur, 'I nor mine
Rest; so my knighthood keep the vows they swore,
The wastest moorland of our realm shall be
Safe, damsel, as the centre of this hall.'"

(Tennyson: Gareth and Lynette 579-582 and 587-590)

Human institutions are rooted ultimately in human needs. Once fairly established they tend to overreach their original function, and in course of time they not infrequently put forth so many excrescences that society is forced to slough them off. A few there are so vital that they endure from age to age, though the outward form inevitably changes with the passing centuries. The majority flourish for a longer or shorter period and disappear, either because inherently defective, or because they have outlived their usefulness. They are but steps whereby humanity moves from one phase of its development to another. To this class belongs the institution of chivalry, which served its purpose in the world and passed away.

Chivalry arose in the days when the enforcement of law, the maintenance of property, and the protection of human life

were largely individual problems. Extraordinary gifts of brawn or brain, together with greed of wealth or power, had produced a sort of pseudo-aristocracy which preyed upon the weak, and waged perpetual internecine war within its own ranks. The great empires of the past had become disintegrated, and the central power of the state was reduced to a minimum. Scarcely could it preserve an outward semblance of dignity. Society was little better than an armed camp, in which no man was sufficient to himself. He who had means and leisure transformed his home into a fortress, and studied with all diligence the arts by which he might hope to protect it. But even so his chance was small, if he stood alone. For the poor man, the case was all but hopeless. Yet the work of the world must be done - harvest must at least follow seed-time if rich and poor alike were not to starve. Chaos lay in sight, with but one alternative - cooperation. Thus arose the feudal system, in which a certain modus vivendi was at last attained. The poor pledged service in return for protection, and acquired a conditional right to till the soil, while the rich and powerful undertook to maintain some degree of law and order. The code of manners, morals and ideals which gradually took shape among the ruling class is what we know today as the institution of chivalry.

Viewed from our modern standpoint, the feudal system may appear a poor makeshift. Certain it is that the excessive privileges and immunities of the nobles led, in time, to flagrant abuses. But we must distinguish carefully between chivalry at its best and feudalism at its worst. The

knightly calling found its justification in the practical necessities of a turbulent time. Violence must be met by violence; the evil-doer must be taught that the arm of justice was puissant and sure. This was the task of the knight-errant - especially of the knight of the Round Table. How efficiently he performed it may be gathered from the reply of Sir Launcelot's knights, when he announced to them his final departure from England:

- 369 "We have shame that will leave you; for we all understand in this realm will be now no quiet, but ever strife and debate, now the fellowship of the Round Table is broken; for by the noble fellowship of the Round Table was King Arthur upborne, and by their noblesse the king and all his realm was in quiet and rest."

The spirit of the knightly service is admirably illustrated by an incident which is related of Beaumains on his first quest:

- 203 "There was fast by a sycamore tree, and there hung an horn, the greatest that ever they saw, of an elephant's bone; and this Knight of the Red Laundes had hanged it up there, that if there came any errant-knight, he must blow that horn, and then will he make him ready and come to him to do battle. But, sir, I pray you, said the damosel Linet, blow ye not the horn till it be high noon, for now it is about prime, and now increaseth his might, that as men say he hath seven men's strength. Ah, fie for shame, fair damosel, say ye never so more to me; for, an he were as good a knight as ever was, I shall never fail him in his most might, for either I will win

worship worshipfully, or die knightly in the field. And therewith he spurred his horse straight to the sycamore tree, and blew so the horn eagerly that all the siege and the castle rang thereof."

"I shall win worship worshipfully, or die knightly in the field." Herein is the alpha and omega of the knightly law. Just this did chivalry require of every man who girt on a sword - no more, no less. It was his business to win honor by honorable means, or to die in the attempt. Sir Tristram went into his first battle with a clear comprehension of this alternative. Being mounted and ready for the fray, he took leave of his faithful servant, Gouvernail:

- 246 "And commend me unto mine eme King Mark, and pray him if that I be slain in this battle for to inter my body as him seemed best; and as for me, let him wit that I will never yield me for cowardice; and if I be slain and fear not, then they have lost no truage for me; and if so be that I flee or yield me as recreant, bid mine eme never bury me in Christian burials."

It was the pride of the truly great knight to seek out antagonists worthy of his steel, for only thus could he win the highest distinction; and death itself assumed a guise of honor (rather than disgrace) if met in fair fight with a
- 215 doughty adversary. Sir Gawaine once fell to jousting with an errant knight, and only after inflicting a mortal wound, did he discover that chance had betrayed him into slaying
- 216 his "sworn brother", Sir Uwaine les Avoutres. "Alas, said Gawaine, that ever this misadventure is befallen me. No

force, said Uwaine, sith I shall die this death, of a much more worshipfuller man's hand might I not die. - - -Then Sir Gawaine and Sir Ector buried him as men ought to bury a king's son, and made write upon his name, and by whom he was slain."

It must not, however, be supposed that honor never recognized any middle ground between victory and death. Though there were circumstances in which it was shame for a knight to survive defeat, there were others in which the bravest might safely own himself worsted. It was generally acknowledged that discretion was, at times, "the better part of valor", but just where lay the dividing line between discretion and cowardice was not so easily determined. Upon this question there seems to have been a difference of
- 140 opinion, even among the greatest. Sir Launcelot once led ten thousand of his knights to a dearly bought victory over sixty thousand Romans. When King Arthur heard of it, he
- 141 "wept, and dried his eyes with a kerchef, and said, Your courage had near hand destroyed you, for though ye had returned again, ye had lost no worship; for I call it folly, knights to abide when they be overmatched. Nay, said Launcelot - - - , for once shamed may never be recovered." As a matter of fact, no knight could hope for entire immunity from mishap.
- 317 "For he was never formed (comments Malory) that all times might stand, but sometime he was put to the worse by malfortune; and at sometime the worse knight put the better knight to a rebuke."

There was in these knights an extraordinary power of

- 102 physical endurance. Of "Sir Arthur" it is recorded that on one occasion, "he lost so much blood that it was marvel he stood on his feet, but he was so full of knighthood that knightly he endured the pain". The exigencies of a life of adventure not infrequently called a knight to combat when he was by no means in fighting trim. Though Sir Tristram
- 23 was "sore bruised and hurt" when King Mark sought his aid against Elias of Ireland, he did not hesitate. "Sithen Sir Elias proffereth so largely - - - he shall be answered, for as yet my wounds be green, and they will be sorer a seven night after than they be now; and therefore he shall have his answer that I will do battle tomorn with him."

In the realm of the emotions we find an almost ludicrous contrast to this admirable self-control. The great knights give vent to their joys and sorrows like the veriest children. Queen Guenever and "the haut prince" were so
- 50 delighted with one of Launcelot's jokes on Sir Dinadan that they laughed "that they might not sit at their table"; and immoderate weeping was of every-day occurrence. Palomides
- 112 once came upon a knight in the forest, who "made the greatest dole that ever he heard man make, for ever he wept, and therewith he sighed as though he would die. Then Sir Palomides rode near him and saluted him mildly and said: Fair knight, why wail ye so? let me lie down and wail with you." And thereupon they proceeded to tell one another their most private affairs, with a view to determining which had really the greater cause for complaint.

From this general survey of the origin and spirit of

the knightly calling, we now pass to a more detailed study of the knightly duty. Each age has its own moral standards and each, its own practical problems. With due regard to these two factors, each evolves, consciously or unconsciously, its own code of honor. Though this code may never be reduced to explicit form, its requirements are clear, its authority is final. Representing, as it does, the dictates of the public conscience, it reflects infallibly the moral elevation, or degradation, of the society from which it springs. Let us then seek to determine the content of this word honor, as interpreted by Malory's knights.

The underlying principles of the chivalric code of honor have already been discussed in the preceding chapter. Valor, truth, fidelity, courtesy, gentleness, magnanimity - these are the more important elements of the knightly ideal. We are at present concerned, not with these virtues in the abstract, but with their concrete exemplification in life.

The mention of knightly valor immediately suggests fighting as the one real business of knighthood. This association of ideas is natural, and, to a great extent, justified by the facts of the case. It was undoubtedly by its ability to fight that chivalry won, and long maintained, its foothold among men. The knights of Malory are indeed professional fighters, their very pastime being combat among themselves, in absence of any real foe. But they are no mere brawlers. Jousting, as practised in time of peace, is simply a game of skill, albeit a rough one; actual conflict with an enemy is another matter, but even this is sub-

ject to certain well defined laws of fair play and humanity.

The good knight always held himself in readiness to fight, should occasion demand it. Especially was this true of the knight-errant, who might, at any moment, be confronted by a peremptory adversary. - 63 "Is that the rule of you errant knights for to make a knight to joust will he or nill?" asked Epinegris of Sir Dinadan; and the answer left no choice to Epinegris. But there were occasions when a challenge by the way might be politely refused. Sir Uwaine was inclined to recommend this course when he and Sir Gawaine encountered Sir Marhaus. - 113 "Let him go, said Sir Uwaine unto Sir Gawaine, for he is a passing good knight as any is living; I would not by my will that any of us were matched with him. Nay, said Sir Gawaine, not so, it were shame to us were he not assayed, were he never so good a knight. Well, said Sir Uwaine, I will assay him afore you, for I am more weaker than ye, and if he smite me down then may ye revenge me." In this conversation we see a dilemma which not infrequently presented itself. By the refusal of a challenge, a knight laid himself open to the intolerable suspicion of cowardice, while its acceptance might entail almost certain defeat, if not death.

Sir Uwaine's case was less desperate than that of the knight who must face this hard choice alone. His final proposal, that he be the first to fight, is noteworthy in view of his reluctance to fight at all. It is clear that he valued the hope of being avenged, if overthrown, more highly than the possible chance of escaping the conflict altogether.

. p. 31 The significance of vengeance to the world of chivalry has already been discussed. Suffice it to add here that the right to demand vengeance was fully recognized, and it was
. II - the part of no good knight to seek to escape the avenger.
- 79

We have said that a knight might sometimes refuse to fight without compromising his honor. The circumstances which gave him this option were, however, strictly limited. If any real issues were at stake, or if his duty were even remotely involved, such refusal was out of the question. More than this, he must stand ready at any moment to adopt the offensive himself. His knighthood laid upon him certain specific obligations which he must fulfill at all costs. These we may group, for the sake of convenience, under three heads:

1.) A knight must defend his own good name, the good name of his friends, the good name of his fellowship.

That the truly valiant knight must resent and punish personal insult is self-evident. The Christian doctrine of nonresistance was as alien to the spirit of chivalry as the Christian idea of vengeance. Long and patiently, in the last bitter war, Sir Launcelot endured the taunts of Sir Gawaine, but the epithets "traitor" and "coward" put an end to for-
- 374 bearance. "So God me help, said Sir Launcelot, I am right heavy of Sir Gawaine's words, for now he charged me with a great charge; and therefore I wot it as well as ye, that I must defend me, or else be recreant." It seems clear indeed that it was outraged honor, rather than grief or wrath, which

- 353 forced Arthur into this war. "Alas (he says), my good knights be slain away from me: now within these two days I have lost forty knights, and also the noble fellowship of Sir Launcelot and his blood, for now I may never hold them together no more with my worship. Alas that ever this war began."

Loyalty to one's friends and fidelity to one's fellowship were the veriest commonplaces of the knightly code of honor. The true knight fought not for himself alone. The knowledge that others would inevitably share his glory or his shame nerved the arm of more than one hard-pressed combatant. So it was with Sir Bleoberis in the face of superior
- 59- numbers. When he "saw that they were four knights and he
60 but himself, he stood in a doubt whether he would turn or hold his way. Then he said to himself: I am a knight of the Table Round, and rather than I should shame mine oath and my blood I will hold my way whatsoever fall thereof."

Sir Uwaine once refused to fight with Sir Gaheris,
- 360 upbraiding him thus: "Sir ye do not your part. For, sir, the first time ye were made knight of the Round Table ye sware that ye should not have ado with your fellowship wittingly. And pardie, - - - though ye would break your oath I would not break mine. - - - Then was Sir Gaheris shamed." Yet it is undeniable that the Round Table knights considered themselves free to choose the opposing side in festive tour-
I - 310 naments. The greatest availed themselves of this privilege -
186.
- 109 Sir Launcelot, Sir Galahad, Sir Gareth, Sir Tristram - and King Arthur, on at least one memorable occasion, gave it the stamp of his approval. Sir Launcelot, in disguise,

was fighting against Arthur and his companions of the Round Table, when Sir Gareth suddenly recognized him, and in the midst of the conflict forsook one side for the other. The king was at first disposed to blame the young knight for his seeming treachery. But when Sir Gareth explained:

II - 313 "My lord, - - - he made me knight, and when I saw him so hard bestad, methought it was my worship to help him," the king replied heartily: "Truly, - - - ye say well, and worshipfully have ye done and to yourself great worship; and all the days of my life - - - wit you well I shall love you, and trust you the more better."

In days of prosperity we may, then, find friend pitted against friend in gallant rivalry - in days of adversity, never. Misfortune or danger was as a trumpet call to every good knight. Sir Launcelot appealed to his friends with all confidence when the last great war began, and they

I - 346 did not disappoint him. "Sir, said Sir Bors, all is welcome that God sendeth us, and we have had much weal with you and much worship, and therefore we will take the woe with you as we have taken the weal."

2.) A knight must uphold the cause of the ladies.

This point has been fully discussed in chapter V. We therefore append here a single incident, which requires no comment.

I - 127 "So there were in the country two knights that were brethren - - - ; and these two brethren had disherited the Lady of the Rock of a barony of lands by their extortion. And as this knight was lodged with his lady she made her

complaint to him of these two knights. Madam, said Sir Uwaine, they are to blame, for they do against the high order of knighthood, and the oath that they made; and if it like you I will speak with them, by cause I am a knight of King Arthur's, and I will entreat them with fairness; and if they will not, I shall do battle with them, and in the defence of your right. Gramercy, said the lady, and thereas I may not acquit you, God shall."

3.) A knight must defend the cause of the weak, the wronged, the oppressed.

We read that Sir Launcelot once came upon "a fair
I - 210 plain, and beside that a fair castle", before which a great tournament was in progress. For some time he looked on with a non-partisan interest. "And at the last him thought they of the castle were put to the worse. Then thought Sir Launcelot for to help there the weaker party in increasing of his chivalry. And so Sir Launcelot thrust in among the party of the castle."

Herein is the essence of chivalry. We have already noted that instinct to succor the distressed, which belonged to every true knight. In Launcelot, "the best knight - - - of any sinful man of the world", this instinct was peculiarly strong. Even in madness he could not see a man worsted
I - 147 without the impulse to go to his assistance. "As wood as he was he was sorry for his lord, Sir Bliant," when he saw him fighting a losing battle against two knights. After breaking the chains which bound him, though "he hurt his hands sore" thereby, he rushed, without harness or weapon, to

the rescue.

So distinctly was it understood that the knights of the Round Table were the unrelenting foes of all evil and oppression, that Beaumains was filled with amazement when he learned of the crimes of the Red Knight of the Red
I - 203 Laundes. "Truly, said Beaumains, he may well be a good knight, but he useth shameful customs, and it is marvel that he endureth so long that none of the noble knights of my lord Arthur's have not dealt with him." But before that sun had set the last-made of Arthur's knights had dealt with him so effectually that he forsook his evil ways forever.

We have intimated that all knightly combats, whether "in love" or "in wrath", were subject to certain restrictions, which were calculated to temper their ferocity. Most, if not all, of these rules of the game were rooted in the single principle of fair play. No man must be permitted to take a mean advantage of another. But what then constituted a mean advantage? To this question chivalry gave several quite unequivocal answers:

(1.) No armed knight must set upon one unarmed.

Sir Tristram, unarmed save for his sword, once chanced to meet his mortal enemy, Sir Palomides, in full harness. But the gallant knight was not to be daunted, and he forthwith attacked his foe.

- 159 "And then Sir Palomides said to himself: An Sir Tristram were armed, it were hard to seace him of this battle, and if I turn again and slay him I am ashamed wheresomever

that I go. Then Sir Tristram spake and said: Thou coward knight, what castest thou to do; why wilt thou not do battle with me? for have thou no doubt I shall endure all thy malice. Ah, Sir Tristram, said Palomides, full well thou wotest I may not fight with thee for shame, for thou art here naked and I am armed, and if I slay thee, dishonour shall be mine. - - - Now, I require you, tell me a question that I shall say to you. Tell me what it is, said Sir Tristram, and I shall answer you the truth, as God me help. I put case, said Sir Palomides, that ye were armed at all rights as well as I am, and I naked as ye be, what would you do to me now, by your true knighthood? Ah, said Sir Tristram, now I understand thee well - - -: wit Sir Palomides, as at this time thou shouldest depart from me, for I would not have ado with thee. No more will I, said Palomides, and therefore ride forth on thy way."

(2.) No knight must strike a sleeping enemy.

Sir Pelleas had been most basely deceived and grievously wronged by Sir Gawaine. While yet the wound was fresh, he came upon the traitor sleeping. His first impulse was to satisfy the cry of his soul for vengeance.
- 121 But he thought better of it, "and said thus to himself: Though this knight be never so false, I will never slay him sleeping, for I will never destroy the high order of knighthood; and therewith he departed again". But across Sir Gawaine's throat he left his naked sword!

(3.) No knight must strike a prostrate foe.

- 60 "Fie for shame! strike never a knight when he is at

the earth," cried Sir Harry le Fise Lake to Breuse Saunce Pité, who was about to slay the helpless Bleoberis. And Sir Launcelot, in his second fight with Sir Gawaine, recoiled with horror from the thought of such a possibility. The wounded Gawaine, unable to rise, demanded that Launcelot - 378- 379 "perform this battle unto the uttermost. I will no more do than I have done, said Sir Launcelot, for when I see you on foot I will do battle upon you all the while I see you stand on your feet; but for to smite a wounded man that may not stand, God defend me from such shame."

(4.) No knight must ill-use a fool, or "one out of his wit".

- 82 Sir Palomides was about to slay a strange knight who threatened Sir Tristram's life, when the latter stopped him. "Let be, said Sir Tristram, slay him not, the knight is but a fool, it were shame to slay him. But take away his spear, said Sir Tristram, and let him take his horse and go where that he will."

The great Launcelot himself benefited by this provision, in those days when he wandered through the land, half starved, half naked, and "wild wood". Having possessed - 146 himself of a sword, he almost killed a certain knight who tried to wrest it from him. But when his victim recovered consciousness and asked who his assailant might be, his dwarf replied: "Sir - - - it is not worship to hurt him, for he is a man out of his wit; and doubt ye not he hath been a man of great worship, and for some heartly sorrow that he hath taken, he is fallen mad ."

(5.) No knight must be crushed by sheer weight of superior numbers.

- 312 On one of those occasions when Sir Launcelot fought in disguise against his own fellowship, King Arthur "was wroth out of measure that he and his knights might not prevail that day". In his desperation, he begged Sir Gawaine's advice:

"Sir, said Sir Gawaine, ye shall have my counsel: let blow unto lodging, for an he be Sir Launcelot du Lake, and my brother, Sir Gareth, with him, with the help of that good young knight, Sir Lavaine, trust me truly it will be no boot to strive with them but if we should fall ten or twelve upon one knight, and that were no worship, but shame. Ye say truth, said the king; and for to say sooth, said the king, it were shame to us so many as we be to set upon them any more; for wit ye well, said King Arthur, they be three good knights, and namely that knight with the sleeve of gold. So then they blew unto lodging."

(6.) No knight must be required to joust when over-weary.

Sir Lamorak, in disguise, did marvellous feats of arms upon a certain day, overthrowing, among others, Sir Palomides. When the victor left the field, Sir Palomides

- 399 turned to Sir Dinadan and said: "I cast me to ride after him, and to be revenged with my sword, for ahorseback I deem I shall get no worship of him. Sir Palomides, said Dinadan, ye shall not meddle with him, by my counsel, for ye shall get no worship of him; and for this cause, ye

have seen him this day have had overmuch to done, and overmuch travailed." Yet Palomides persisted, and the unknown knight reluctantly accepted his challenge. After sore fighting, Sir Palomides begged his antagonist to tell him his name:

400 "Sir, said the knight to Palomides, that is me loth to do, for thou hast done me wrong and no knighthood to proffer me battle, considering my great travail, but an thou wilt tell me thy name I will tell thee mine. Sir, said he, wit thou well my name is Palomides. Ah, sir, ye shall understand my name is Sir Lamorak de Galis - - - . When Sir Palomides heard him say so he kneeled down and asked mercy, for outrageously have I done to you this day; considering the great deeds of arms I have seen you do, shamefully and unknightly I have required you to do battle."

It is here plain that even so good a knight as Sir Palomides could be roused to the point where he deliberately transgressed the law of fair play. Yet he explicitly admits the validity of the principle which he violated. It must indeed be confessed that the last two points of the law were frequently forgotten or ignored. In the heat of conflict many a knight was overcome by superior numbers, and many an overwearied one was forced to fight on, if unwilling to forfeit his hard won honors.

The same instinct which placed so strong an emphasis on fair play, found further expression in the sacredness of the knightly word of honor. There is nothing more admirable in the whole chivalric code than the knight's

respect, both for his own word, and for the word of others. He needed no court to hold him to his promise, he asked no court to release him from it. Before the bar of his own self-respect he was bound to abide by it, even though he had sworn to his own hurt. It was customary, among the knights of the Round Table, to require of conquered knights an oath of eternal allegiance to King Arthur. Having pledged themselves to take this oath before him at a given time and place, such knights were allowed to ride whither they would; and the basest among them was apparently never known to break his parole.

So inconceivable was the idea of false swearing among good knights, that none hesitated to trust the word of his bitterest enemy. Sir Tristram and Sir Palomides once met so fully armed that mutual recognition was impossible.

- 68 "What is your name? said Sir Tristram. Wit ye well, said that knight, my name is Sir Palomides. What knight hate ye most? said Sir Tristram. Sir knight, said he, I hate Sir Tristram to the death, for an I may meet with him the one of us shall die. Ye say well, said Sir Tristram, and wit ye well that I am Sir Tristram de Liones, and now do your worst. When Sir Palomides heard him say so he was astonied. And then he said thus: I pray you, Sir Tristram, forgive me all mine evil will, and if I live I shall do you service above all other knights that be living - - - . And right so I will take you, said Sir Tristram. And so they rode forth on their ways talking of many things."

- 171-2 The knightly word, once passed, was irrevocable. It

was Sir Gawaine who first pledged himself to the quest of the Grail, and many of the Round Table fellowship followed
- 172 his example. "Anon as King Arthur heard this he was greatly displeased, for he wist well they might not again say their avows. Alas, said King Arthur unto Sir Gawaine, ye have nigh slain me with the avow and promise that ye have made." King though he was, he could devise no escape from the fateful obligation which his knights had assumed.

There can be no question that the true knight valued his personal integrity more highly than his life. Yet even in this realm, we find traces of that inconsistency which is so characteristic of the Morte Darthur. Deceit, as a means to an end, was apparently held to be entirely legitimate in many cases.

The right of any knight to assume a disguise was freely recognized. This was a favorite diversion of Sir Launcelot,
- 169 and he even amused himself by donning Sir Kay's armor, and thereby enticing into combat, those who would never knowingly have matched themselves against him. Such an escapade as this seems to have been regarded merely as a good joke. But deceit might also be turned to more serious purpose, and under some circumstances it was undoubtedly reckoned a virtue.

- 26 When the "gentle Prince Boudwin" had been treacherously slain by his brother, King Mark, his wife fled in terror with her infant son, Alisander. Mark sent Sir Sadok to bring her back. He soon overtook her, but allowed her to continue her flight, on condition that she should rear her son to avenge
27-'8 his father's death. "And when Sadok came to King Mark he told

him faithfully that he had drowned young Alisander her son." It is easy to understand that chivalry would commend, rather than condemn, the formal perjury of a case like this. That a knight's allegiance to his lady might entail occasional
. p. 53 falsehoods is also apparent. We have seen that it was his duty to defend her cause at all times, and regardless of its justice or injustice. Launcelot's obligation to Guenever was thus quite clear. When the supreme crisis came, he
I - 347 must save her at all costs. "An ye did otherwise, all the world will speak of you shame to the world's end," declared Sir Bors. And Sir Launcelot proved equal to the emergency. Not only did he rescue his lady from the fire; in due time he also returned her to her lord, with solemn and positive avowals of her innocence. Nothing less than this would have satisfied the demands of the situation, though he, of all men, knew her to be guilty.

As the brutality of the knightly combat was mitigated by the dictates of fair play, so the roughness of the whole knightly life was tempered by the spirit of courtesy. Courtesy, in the largest sense, was incompatible with everything narrow or mean. It excluded altogether the petty jealousies, suspicions and self-conceits of small minds. King Arthur received Sir Galahad with the deference due to the
- 168 peerless knight-to-be: "Sir, ye be welcome, for ye shall move many good knights to the quest of the Sangreal, and ye shall achieve that never knights might bring to an end." Launcelot accepted without hesitation the invitation of Sir
- 326 Meliagrance to inspect his castle: "For Sir Launcelot dread

no perils; for ever a man of worship and of prowess dreadeth least always perils, for they ween every man be as they be." And Palomides, face to face with Sir Tristram, was ashamed of the rancor in his heart. "Meseemeth (he said) that ye are
- 68 a good knight, and none other knight that named himself a good knight should not hate you."

The courtesy which bound all "good knights" in mutual respect, is no less admirable than the deference which was accorded to gentlewomen. Opponents about to clash in mortal conflict not infrequently exchanged courtly words of appreciation of one another's prowess. The first meeting of Sir Marhaus and the yet untried Sir Tristram is noteworthy.

246-'7 "And then Sir Marhaus avised Sir Tristram, and said thus: Young knight, Sir Tristram, what dost thou here? me sore repenteth of thy courage, for wit thou well, I have been assayed, and the best knights of this land have been assayed of my hand. - - - And fair knight and well-proved knight, said Sir Tristram, - - - thou art called one of the most renowned knights of the world, - - - and sythen I took the order of knighthood this day, I am well pleased that I may have ado with so good a knight as thou art."

It is even more remarkable that courtesy frequently survived the heat of combat itself, and served as a medium for the establishment of friendly relations between the
114 contestants. There is a wierd account of a conflict between Sir Gawaine, whose strength waned steadily after the sun passed the zenith, and Sir Marhaus, who became "bigger and bigger", as it dropped toward the west. But Sir

Marhaus refused to take advantage of the weakness of his gallant foe:

I - 114 "Sir knight, said Sir Marhaus, I have well felt that ye are a passing good knight and a marvellous man of might as ever I felt any, while it lasteth, and our quarrels are not great, and therefore it were pity to do you hurt, for I feel ye are passing feeble. Ah, said Sir Gawaine, gentle knight, ye say the word that I should say. And therewith they took off their helms, and either kissed other, and there they swore together either to love other as brethren."

It is plain that courtesy has here passed over into something deeper than any mere observance of outward forms. As a matter of fact, the instinct of courtesy, in the Morte Darthur, merges, at times, into a sort of Quixotic sense of honor, which goes far toward justifying our modern use of the word chivalry. This is nowhere better illustrated than in the attitude of Sir Launcelot when Arthur invaded his realm. Though love had led him to wrong the king most grievously, though he had been driven, in consequence, from the court, he still owed allegiance, in his own heart, to the man who had made him knight. One wrong neither required nor justified another, and he refused to lift his hand against his former friend. In spite of all remonstrances, he allowed a foreign army to overrun his domain, while he sat passive at home.

- 372 "Then spake King Bagdemagus to Sir Launcelot: Sir, your courtesy will shende us all, and thy courtesy hath waked all this sorrow; for an they thus over our lands ride, they

shall by process bring us all to nought whilst we thus in holes us hide."

We have said that chivalry knew no dividing line between courtesy and generosity. This is strikingly illustrated in the royal entertainment which everywhere awaited the traveler. The knight-errant was, to all intents and purposes, a man without a home. He must therefore seek food and shelter wherever they might be found. Many a castle stood isolated in the midst of miles of otherwise uninhabited country. Hence the duty of hospitality. No knight hesitated to ask hospitality, no good knight hesitated to give it, regardless of circumstances. So it befel, not infrequently, that the evening meal brought together, in mutual confidence, those who had fought fiercely in the afternoon just past, or who would join mortal combat on the morrow. As host and guest they were safe for the night. It was only such notorious traitors as King Mark and Sir Meliagrance who could conceive of violating the sacred obligations of hospitality.

The sum and substance of all that we have said of the knightly calling, is inherent in an episode that is re-
168 lated of Sir Launcelot. Being roused in the night by a loud knocking at the gate, he saw one knight defending himself against three. "Truly, said Sir Launcelot, yonder one knight shall I help, for it were shame for me to see three knights on one. And if he be slain I am partner of his death, and therewith he took his harness, and went out at a window by a sheet down to the four knights." The needy

knight proved to be Sir Kay, and for him the odds were hopeless. But it required only six of Launcelot's mighty strokes to lay low all three of his antagonists. They accordingly proposed to yield themselves as recreant. "As to that, said Sir Launcelot, I will not take your yielding unto me. But so that ye will yield you unto Sir Kay the Seneschal, on that covenant I will save your lives, and else not." Remonstrances were vain; as Sir Kay's prisoners they presented themselves in due time at Arthur's court. To the seneschal's warm expression of his gratitude, Sir Launcelot replied simply;
- 169 "Sir, - - - I have nothing done but that me ought for to do, and ye are welcome ."

By way of recapitulation we may call special attention to the following points of this incident:

1.) Sir Launcelot's response to the call of need was instant and unhesitating; otherwise the blood of the unfortunate man would have been on his head.

2.) Having won so signal a victory, he transferred all credit to him whose fight it was in the beginning.

3.) Though the conquered knights might have been held deserving of death for setting upon Sir Kay, three to one, Sir Launcelot granted them mercy.

4.) The recreant knights failed not to keep their parole.

5.) Sir Launcelot courteously refused all thanks, holding that he had done no more than his duty.

"Noblesse oblige" - this was the essence of the knightly calling.

CHAPTER IX.

The Knightly Quest.

"'For here be mighty men to joust with, weigh
Whether thou wilt not with thy damsel back
To crave again Sir Lancelot of the King.
Thy pardon; I but speak for thine avail,
The saver of my life.'

And Gareth said,
'Full pardon, but I follow up the quest,
Despite of Day and Night and Death and Hell.'"

(Tennyson: Gareth and Lynette 859-865.)

The fundamental justification of chivalry we have found in the exigencies of a lawless age. Society was trembling on the brink of anarchy when the forces of disintegration were checked by the rise of the knightly order. No subsequent abuse of its power can annul the real service which chivalry performed at that time; and for the romancer, the defence of the public weal remains, to the end, the true vocation of knighthood. Though Malory reveled in the pageantry of tilt and tournament, he never forgot that this was but incidental to the real business of the knightly life.

The fellowship of the Round Table, as presented by the Morte Darthur, may be construed as a sort of mounted police, pledged to track evil to its lair and stamp it out at all cost. But seldom only did its members work together in large companies. Even when many pursued a common end, they

usually dispersed over the land in very small groups. So it was when they sought the lost Sir Launcelot; so it was in the quest of the Grail. And the smallest company was liable to separation at any moment. When Sir Melias claimed his
- 179 boon from Sir Galahad, he asked only: "That ye will suffer me to ride with you - - - till that some adventure depart us." He knew full well that the term of their comradeship would probably be brief.

It is then clear that the efficiency of the knightly body depended, in a peculiar degree, upon individual initiative and faithfulness. He who had put his hand to the plough must not turn back. Until the last knight had mastered the lesson of personal responsibility, the whole chain of knighthood was weakened by the uncertain temper of a single link. The logic of the situation was plain - to every knight his quest, i. e. an "adventure," a duty, for which he should be held strictly and solely accountable. The quest might represent the response to the call of actual need, or it might be altogether impractical and fantastic. In either case the principle remained the same. For the time being one task took precedence of all else, and every faculty was strained to effect its accomplishment.

We have seen that the fulfilment of a quest constituted a sort of indispensable initiation into the order of knighthood. We are now in a position to understand why this was so. It was of the highest importance that the young recruit should cherish no illusions regarding the life upon which he had entered. Too easily his ardent youth might blind him to

its true significance. He must learn that knighthood meant obligation, not feasting in hall; that honor was attainable only at the cost of toil and blood; that the right to rest and revel came only as the reward of duty done. All this his quest was calculated to teach him. By plunging him forthwith into the turmoil of actual conflict, it gave him a grip on the stern realities, as opposed to the outward glamour, of the knightly calling. It tried his mettle, it cleared his vision, it sobered and steadied him. It formed, in short, the only logical introduction to the hardships that lay before him.

The wedding feast of Arthur and Guenever was marked by one of those curious episodes which frequently occurred on such occasions of state, and which commonly proved to be fraught with some mystic significance. As the knights sat about the festal board, Merlin bade them keep their places, promising them "a strange and marvellous adventure". And
76 they were not disappointed. "Right so - - - there came running in a white hart into the hall, and a white brachet next him, and thirty couple of black running hounds came after them with a great cry." Then followed an extraordinary scene in which figured a knight who carried off the brachet, an indignant lady who claimed the brachet and demanded its return, and a second knight, who came "riding all armed on a great horse, and took the lady away with him with force," while "she cried and made great dole". Relieved at the turn which matters had taken, the king would have rested satisfied, had not the great magician admonished him:

76 "Nay, - - - ye may not leave these adventures so lightly, for these adventures must be brought again or else it would be disworship to you and to your feast. I will, said the king, that all be done by your advice. Then, said Merlin, let call Sir Gawaine, for he must bring again the white hart. Also, sir, ye must let call Sir Tor, for he must bring again the brachet and the knight, or else slay him. Also let call King Pellinore, for he must bring again the lady and the knight, or else slay him. And these three knights shall do marvellous adventures or they come again. Then were they called all three as it rehearseth afore, and every each of them took his charge, and armed them surely."

Sir Gawaine and Sir Tor rode forth that day on their first quest; King Pellinore was already a seasoned knight. But not one of them hesitated or asked a reason for the task imposed upon him. It was enough that the "worship" of Arthur was, in some mysterious way, at stake, and that to them was offered the inestimable privilege of defending it. Each one achieved his end, but so severe were the tests through which they passed that Sir Tor alone escaped with unsullied honor. A brief review of their several experiences will serve to illustrate both the spirit of the knightly quest, and the "marvellous adventures" which always, and everywhere, gave it significance.

77 "As Gawaine followed the hart by the cry of the hounds, even afore him there was a great river, and the hart swam over; and as Sir Gawaine would follow after, there stood a knight over the other side, and said, Sir knight, come not

over after this hart but if thou wilt joust with me. I will not fail as for that, said Sir Gawaine, to follow the quest that I am in, and so made his horse to swim over the water." Having slain the knight who thus barred his way, he loosed his hounds upon the hart. In vain the poor creature tried to effect its escape. It was soon overtaken and Sir Gawaine's quest was apparently at an end. But the owner of the hart appeared, slew two of the hounds and, to complete his vengeance, made ready to fight with Sir Gawaine. He was, however, no match for the
l - 78 young knight, and in the end "he cried mercy, and yielded him, and besought him as he was a knight and gentleman, to save his life. Thou shalt die, said Sir Gawaine, for slaying of my hounds." This obdurate refusal to show mercy brought its own punishment, and Sir Gawaine's quest ended in deep disgrace.

: - 81 Sir Tor "rode after the knight with the brachet". When called to halt by an insulting challenge from two knights, he answered only: "I may not tarry - - - for I am in a quest that I must needs follow ." Being forced, however, to defend himself, he overthrew both his adversaries, and passed on until
- 82 he came to two pavilions; and "there was the white brachet that bayed - - - fast" at a lady sleeping in one of them. She awoke to protest against the seizure of her pet. "What, will
- 82 ye so, said the lady, take my brachet from me? Yea, said Sir Tor, this brachet have I sought from King Arthur's court hither. Well, said the lady, knight, ye shall not go far with her, but that ye shall be met and grieved. I shall abide what adventure that cometh by the grace of God, and so mounted upon his horse, and passed on his way toward Camelot."

The sacredness of his quest had hardened the gallant youth even against a lady's appeal, and when a knight came to dispute his possession of the brachet, he met him with
- 83 valiant defiance. "Then Sir Tor bad him yield him. That will I not, said Abelleus, while my life lasteth and my soul is within my body, unless that thou wilt give me the brachet. That will I not do, said Sir Tor, for it was my quest to bring again thy brachet, thee, or both." Only when he
-83-84 learned from a maiden that his adversary was "the falsest knight living, and a great destroyer of good knights," did he smite off his head to avenge the foul murder of the maiden's brother. And so his quest was honorably fulfilled.

- 85 King Pellinore rode "after the lady that the knight led away. And as he rode in a forest, he saw in a valley a damosel sit by a well, and a wounded knight in her arms, and Pellinore saluted her. And when she was ware of him, she cried overloud, Help me, knight, for Christ's sake, King Pellinore. And he would not tarry, he was so eager in his quest, and ever she cried an hundred times after help. When she saw he would not abide, she prayed unto God to send him as much need of help as she had, and that he might feel it or he died. So, as the book telleth, the knight there died that there was wounded, wherefore the lady for pure sorrow slew herself with his sword."

In due course of time, the king came upon two knights fighting over the lady whom he sought. Though both insisted upon their right to keep her, he turned to one of them with sharp accusation:

- 86 "Ye came in suddenly there as we were at the high feast, and took away this lady or any mar might make him ready, and therefore it was my quest to bring her again and you both, or else the one of us to abide in the field; therefore the lady shall go with me, or I will die for it, for I have promised it King Arthur. And therefore fight ye no more, for none of you shall have no part of her at this time, and if ye list to fight for her, fight with me, and I will defend her." He fought and won her, and carried her in triumph to Camelot.

But that a knight's obligation to aid a distressed gentlewoman took precedence even of the pursuit of his quest, is proved by the signal punishment which befel King Pellinore for refusing to help the lady in the forest:

- 89 "Ah! Sir Pellinore, said Queen Guenever, ye were greatly to blame that ye saved not this lady's life. Madam, said Pellinore, - - - I was so furious in my quest that I would not abide, and that repenteth me, and shall the days of my life. Truly, said Merlin, ye ought sore to repent it, for that lady was your own daughter - - - . And because ye would not abide and help her, ye shall see your best friend fail you when ye be in the greatest distress that ever ye were or shall be. And that penance God hath ordained you for that deed, that he that ye shall most trust to of any man alive, he shall leave you where ye shall be slain."

When a knight had assumed a given quest, it became so peculiarly his own, that the knightly code forbade any other to meddle with it. If dispute arose, the true knight stood

ready to stake his life for the inviolability of his quest. Yet in at least one such case, a joust proved sufficient to settle the disagreement to the satisfaction of both parties.

II-71 Sir Palomides had definitely espoused the cause of the dead King Hermance, when he was confronted by an unsuspected rival.

- 77 "As he came nigh the city, there came out of a ship a goodly knight armed against him, with his shield on his shoulder, and his hand upon his sword. And anon as he came nigh Sir Palomides he said: Sir Knight, what seek ye here? leave this quest for it is mine, and mine it was or ever it was yours, and therefore I will have it. Sir knight, said Palomides, it may well be that this quest was yours or it was mine, but when the letter was taken out of the dead king's hand, at that time by likelihood there was no knight had undertaken to revenge the death of the king. And so at that time I promised to revenge his death, and so I shall or else I am ashamed. Ye say well, said the knight, but wit ye well then will I fight with you, and who be the better knight of us both, let him take the battle upon hand. I assent me, said Sir Palomides. And then they dressed their shields, and pulled out their swords, and - - - at the last Sir Palomides - - - smote that knight such a stroke that he made him to kneel upon his knees. Then that knight spake on high and said: Gentle knight, hold thy hand. Sir Palomides was goodly and withdrew his hand. Then this knight said: Wit ye well, knight, that thou art better worthy to have this battle than I."

The vanquished champion proved to be the brother of

King Hermance, and he clearly felt that he was fulfilling the spirit, if not the letter, of his quest, in resigning it to a knight superior to himself. Under no other circumstances could he have abandoned it with honor.

So keen was the sense of responsibility for a quest once undertaken that it followed the high-minded knight even to the gates of death. The "adventure of the black shield", which La Cote Male Taile assumed, was, in reality, the bequest of one who had previously taken it upon himself, and perished before its achievement. But his dying thought had been for his quest. A damsel presented herself before Arthur with the shield.

- 301 "Sir, she said, - - - there was a good knight that ought this shield, and this knight had undertaken a great deed of arms to achieve it; and so it misfortuned him another strong knight met with him by sudden adventure, and there they fought long, and either wounded other passing sore; and they were so wary that they left that battle even hand. So this knight that ought this shield saw none other way but he must die; and then he commanded me to bear this shield to the court of King Arthur, he requiring and praying some good knight to take this shield, and that he would fulfil the quest that he was in."

The Morte Darthur abounds in impossible marvels of many sorts, but among them all is none stranger than that perpetual quest of Sir Palomides, the Saracen, which King Pellinore
- 36 had also followed before him. "And this meanwhile there came
- 316 Sir Palomides, the good knight, following the questing beast that had in shape a head like a serpent's head, and a body

like a leopard, buttocks like a lion, and footed like an hart; and in his body there was such a noise as it had been the noise of thirty couple of hounds questing, and such a noise that beast made wheresomever he went; and this beast evermore Sir Palomides followed, for it was called his quest."

Sir Palomides was a knight of distirguished prowess. In joust or in tournament, in love or in war, he bore his full share. He assumed, from time to time, some temporary quest, as e. g. the vengeance of King Hermance, and fulfilled this faithfully, as well as other knightly duties. Yet withal he did not lose sight of the beast. So closely did he track him
- 58 that "when Sir Tristram saw that beast he put on his helm, for he deemed he should hear of Sir Palomides". To him belonged this quest, and it was his boast that he brooked no
- 59 interference with it: "I found never no knight in my quest of this glasting beast, but an he would joust I never refused him. As well may I, said Breuse Saunce Pité, follow that beast as ye. Then shall ye do battle with me, said Palomides." Though the day came when the Saracen embraced Christianity,
- 163 he turned aside only long enough to be christened. As soon as the sacrament was over, he went back to the old quest. This he clearly regarded as the serious business of his life; and death apparently found him, as it had found King Pellinore, still following the beast.

Here is a quest which is unique in several respects. The "beast Galtisant" is noisy and revolting, but we find no indication that he is vicious or destructive. What then was the origin of this quest? The pursuit of such a creature

might indeed be prescribed as exercise or discipline for a young knight; but in that case it would be shame to him to turn to other tasks while this remained unaccomplished. The usual quest moved toward a definite end. In many cases it terminated at the expiration of a prescribed time, whether its object were achieved or not. But while it remained binding at all, its claim was absolute and uncompromising. This quest of the beast is the only one in the whole Morte Darthur which knows neither fulfilment nor time limit, and which yet admits of interruptions for irrelevant, and even trifling, purposes.

We can scarcely fail to ask the significance of a quest so curious and so exceptional. Malory himself, though lavish in explanation and interpretation of the Grail quest, has no suggestions to offer here. We may therefore accept the story as a mere vagary of romance, or we may seek for ourselves a symbolism which shall give it deeper meaning. It is not impossible that we have here an uncouth bodying forth of that all-enveloping mystery to which chivalry was so keenly alive. Beneath the every-day happenings of human life, there runs an elusive undercurrent - a sense of something unattained and unattainable - which yet will not be ignored. The spirit of man reaches out for a reality beyond the vicissitudes of sense and time, and from all temporary toils or pleasures it returns instinctively to that quest. In the cold light of logic this blind groping may seem futile and ridiculous; in the warm aspiration of the soul it nevertheless persists, and in the last analysis appears as the very driving power of life.

p. 26 We have seen that there was inherent in the chivalric order, a mystical strain which developed a peculiar spiritual receptivity. The knights lived in an atmosphere of expectancy which rendered them mentally hospitable to marvels of every description. They held it their duty to maintain an open mind, to adjust their philosophy to facts, however strange. They possessed, moreover, a deep religious instinct which was strongly tinctured with superstition. Given all this, together with a certain romantic impulse not only to translate religion into life, but also to translate life into religion, and we have an ideal soil for the germ of the Grail legend. It took root, it throve, and in due season it burst into bloom with an exotic beauty which seems scarcely of this earth. Yet it was as truly and naturally a product of the age of chivalry, as is our crass materialism the product of our own.

In the quest of the Grail we find the consummation to which all lesser quests had tended. It represents the glorification of the knightly conception of life. While it lasted the grossness of the flesh gave way to the excellence of the spirit. The boy Galahad took his place in the siege perilous, and old standards passed away. The great Launcelot experienced
· 212 ere long his first defeat, and he was plainly warned that his pride must now fall: "As long as ye were knight of earthly knighthood ye were the most marvellous man of the world, and most adventurous. Now, - - - sithen ye be set among the knights of heavenly adventures, - - - in this quest thou shalt have many fellows and thy betters." A new vision filled the souls of many of Arthur's knights, and former glories paled

into insignificance. With presumptuous enthusiasm, they vowed to forsake all else for the quest of the Grail; and with sublime confidence they set forth upon their way. For a time each and every one might have echoed the strain of Tennyson's Galahad:

Sir Galahad -84

"So pass I hostel, hall and grange;
By bridge and ford, by park and pale,
All arm'd I ride, whate'er betide,
Until I find the Holy Grail."

But one by one they fell by the way or turned back in despair. They were knights "of earthly knighthood", and to all save a chosen few the heavenly quest was hopeless from the beginning.

CHAPTER X.

The Quest of the Holy Grail.

"'Tell me, what drove thee from the Table Round,
My brother? was it earthly passion crost?'

'Nay,' said the knight, 'for no such passion mine.
But the sweet vision of the Holy Grail
Drove me from all vainglories, rivalries,
And earthly heats that spring and sparkle out
Among us in the jousts, while women watch
Who wins, who falls, and waste the spiritual strength
Within us, better offer'd up to heaven.'"

(Tennyson: The Holy Grail 28-36.)

The vows of the knights of the Round Table were, so
- 89-90 so far as we find them recorded, of a purely practical nature. They had to do with the relations of man to man, and man to woman, in the life that now is. They contained no mention of God, and imposed no explicit religious obligation. Of the truth of these facts there can be no doubt; yet
ks XIII they appear quite incredible in the light of that portion of
XVII the Morte Darthur which deals directly with the quest of the
- 230 Sangreal. Here the questers are unmistakably "Jesu Christ's knights", and it follows as a matter of course that they
- 230 "ought to be defenders of Holy Church". The heroes of earlier days are scarcely to be recognized in those who now bear their names. A very human group of adventurers, held by vows of simple altruism, has given place to a mystic fellowship of religious enthusiasts, whose piety is unfeignedly

ecclesiastical in character. How are we to account for this sudden transformation?

The superficial answer to this question is not difficult, thanks to those scholars who have applied themselves to a study of Malory's sources. They tell us that his story of the great quest is a "translation of the French Quête du Saint Graal, - - - the only romance of which Galahad is the hero". Since this is a complete work in itself, and one of a highly mystical nature, it is not surprising that its English version should show a contrast to the atmosphere and characterization of other parts of the Morte Darthur. But though this explains many glaring inconsistencies, it leaves untouched a deeper question, viz. why did Malory incorporate the Quête in his Arthurian romance at all?

y. Brit. l. XII 320

We need not here enter upon a discussion of the problems which cluster about the historicity of Arthur and the origin of the Grail legend. Some scholars have held that there was, in the beginning, no connection between them; but "recent research has shown that two notable features of the Arthurian story, the Round Table and the Grail, can be reasonably accounted for as survivals of this (i.e. early Celtic) Nature worship, and were probably parts of the legend from the first". However this may be, the Grail, as the sacred cup of the Holy Supper; is a far cry from any possible pagan prototype; and the fact remains that the Grail portion of the Morte Darthur represents the interpolation of a distinct romance into a heroic story of which it forms, outwardly, no logical part. With the elimination of a few unimportant

. Brit. - 682

connecting links, Books XI - XVII could be cut out bodily without leaving any perceptible hiatus in the narrative. The one element which might be missed is the christening of Sir Palomides. But Malory leaves to conjecture the outcome of his quest of the beast Galtisant, and failure to record his baptism would be a hardly more serious omission.

The quest of the Grail is, then, in no way essential to Malory's development of the Arthurian legend as such. The Round Table fellowship was established without reference to the Grail in the beginning; its unhappy end was the result of internal decay, not of any outward cause whatever; and Arthur himself took no part in the quest. But we have maintained that the enduring significance of the Morte Darthur lies not in romantic content or literary form, but in spiritual quality. The value of any single element must then be judged by its spiritual import for the work as a whole; and here we find the secret of the prominence given to the quest of the Grail. The Arthurian story might indeed be told without it; but that which makes the story worth the telling, is its embodiment of certain ideals which find, in this quest, their logical consummation. In other words, the quest of the Grail carries the Arthurian legend to a climax, in which its myriad tales attain to spiritual unity and coherence.

Cf.
- 70
- 96

Though apparently known by hearsay when the order of the Round Table was established, the Grail for a long time assumed no practical importance to its knights. In the first ten books of the Morte Darthur, it figures only in a few brief references which have no vital bearing on the movement of the

narrative. But in the first chapter of Book XI, a hermit
- 124 foretells the birth and destiny of Galahad: "This same year he shall be gotten that shall sit there in that siege perilous, and he shall [illegible] in the Sangreal." From this point on, the Grail becomes a chief center of interest.

Soon after the hermit's prophecy, fate led Sir Launcelot to the castle of Corbin, where he was invited by King Pelles to accept his hospitality.

- 126 "So they went into the castle to take their repast. And anon there came in a dove at a window, and in her mouth there seemed a little censer of gold. And therewithal there was such a savour as all the spicery of the world had been there. And forthwithal there was upon the table all manner of meats and drinks that they could think upon. So came in a damosel passing fair and young, and she bare a vessel of gold betwixt her hands; and thereto the king kneeled devoutly, and said his prayers, and so did all that were there. O Jesu, said Sir Launcelot, what may this mean? This is, said the king, the richest thing that any man hath living. And when this thing goeth about, the Round Table shall be broken; and wit thou well, said the king, this is the holy Sangreal that ye have seen."

Fifteen years and more were yet to elapse before the fulfilment of this prophecy, but the interim was full of signs and portents. While the son of Llaine was yet a
- 130 babe in arms, Sir Bors found his way to the castle of Corbin, where he too was miraculously fed.

"Sir, said Sir Bors unto King Pelles, this castle may

be named the Castle Adventurous, for here be many strange adventures. That is sooth, said the king, for well may this place be called the adventures place, for there come but few knights here that go away with any worship; be he never so strong, here he may be proved; and but late Sir Gawaine, the good knight, gat but little worship here. For I let you wit, said King Pellam, here shall no knight win no worship but if he be of worship himself and of good living, and that loveth God and dreadeth God, and else he getteth no worship here, be he never so hardy."

How severe were the "adventures" of this castle Sir Bors was to learn by bitter experience. Though superior sanctity enabled him to meet its terrors without disgrace, he
I - 132 was not permitted to enter the Grail chamber; for "he heard a voice that said: Go hence, thou Sir Bors, for as yet thou art not worthy for to be in this place".

The visit of Elaine and the little Galahad to Arthur's court is a painful episode, fraught with grievous consequences. For goaded to madness by the jealous fury of Queen
- 135 Guenever, Sir Launcelot fled the court, "wild wood as ever was man; and so he ran two year, and never man might have grace to know him". But his reason was ultimately restored by the power of the Grail.

- 163 Book XII closes with the baptism of Sir Palomides. "And so the king and all the court were glad that Sir Palomides was christened. And at the same feast in came Galahad and sat in the siege perilous." It would seem something more than chance which makes the christening of the Saracen the last

incident before the introduction of Galahad to the Round Table fellowship. It is, at least, symbolic of the highly rarefied atmosphere of the Grail quest. Caxton himself strikes its key-note in the few lines which he appends to this book:

II - 163 "Here followeth the noble tale of the Sangreal, that called is the holy vessel; and the signification of the blessed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, blessed mote it be, the which was brought into this land by Joseph of Aramathie. Therefore on all sinful souls blessed Lord have thou mercy."

From the day when Sir Launcelot enters the castle of Corbin, there falls over the earth an ever-deepening veil of mysticism, supernaturalism and ecclesiasticism. If the normal world of chivalry seem remote from our own, what shall we say of that peculiarly abnormal creation, through which moves the pageant of the quest of the Grail? We have here passed into a realm where natural law, if not altogether suspended, is at least suspensible at any moment. Miracles are of daily occurrence, and they are accepted as matters of course. It is an essentially spiritual quest with which we have to deal, and the world of the flesh, with all its laws, its institutions, its standards, has sunk into abeyance; it serves, for the time being, but as an allegorical form for the mediation of a higher reality.

The process of spiritualization can be traced into almost every detail of the knightly life. Knighthood itself now assumes a distinctly religious dignity. When Sir Galahad and Sir Helias come to a parting of the ways, Sir Helias begged permis-

- 179 sion to take the road to the left. "For thou shalt in this

way be soon essayed," ran the legend which caught his eager eye. But disaster came swiftly upon him, and he was carried,
I - 181 sorely wounded, to the cell of an old monk. "Sir, said the good man, for his sin he was thus wounded; and I marvel, said the good man, how ye durst take upon you so rich a thing as the high order of knighthood without clene confession, and that was the cause ye were bitterly wounded. For the way on
I. also the right hand betokeneth the highway of our Lord Jesu Christ
I - 230 and the way of a true good liver. And the other way betokeneth the way of sinners and of misbelievers."

The very shape of the Round Table is discovered to be symbolic, and the establishment of its fellowship is brought into direct connection with this quest.

I - 193-194 "Also Merlin made the Round Table in tokening of roundness of the world, for by the Round Table is the world signified by right, for all the world, Christian and heathen, repair unto the Round Table - - - . When Merlin had ordained the Round Table he said, by them which should be fellows of the Round Table the truth of the Sangreal should be well
- 194 known." And the siege perilous he made "that no man should sit in it but he all only that shall pass all other knights".

The quest of the Grail was so purely idealistic, that it lacked even the semblance of practical purpose. The vow of the questers, as formulated by Sir Gawaine, aimed solely at a clear sight of the Holy Vessel:

- 171 "Now, said Sir Gawaine, we have been served this day of what meats and drinks we thought on; but one thing beguiled us, we might not see the Holy Grail, it was so preciously

covered. Wherefore I will make here avow, that tomorn, without longer abiding, I shall labour in the quest of the Sangreal, that I shall hold me out a twelve month and a day, or more if need be, and never shall I return again unto the court till I have seen it more openly than it hath been seen here; and if I may not speed I shall return again as he that may not be against the will of our Lord Jesu Christ."

The radical change of standards which attends the opening of the Grail quest is reflected in the gradual loss of prestige of the hitherto peerless Launcelot. The theory of Miss Jessie
XII-320 Laidlay Weston, as set forth in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, is interesting in this connection: "Lancelot, as lover of Guinevere, could not be permitted to achieve so spiritual an emprise, yet as leading knight of Arthur's court it was impossible to allow him to be surpassed by another. Hence the invention of Galahad, son to Lancelot by the Grail king's daughter; predestined by his lineage to achieve the quest, foredoomed, the quest achieved, to vanish, a sacrifice to his father's fame, which, enhanced by connexion with the Grail-winner, could not risk eclipse by his presence."

Let us trace briefly the steps of the great knight's humiliation and repentance.

Sir Launcelot was himself painfully conscious that the coming of Galahad marked the end of his ascendancy, but he met the inevitable with manly dignity. When the stone in which Merlin had fixed Balin's sword, floated down to Camelot, the knights thronged to the river-bank to behold the marvel. And as they gazed in wonder, they discovered that there were,

- 166 in the pommel, "precious stones wrought with subtil letters of gold".

- 166 "Then the barons read the letters which said in this wise: Never shall man take me hence, but only he by whose side I ought to hang, and he shall be the best knight of the world. When the king had seen the letters, he said unto Sir Launcelot: Fair sir, this sword ought to be yours, for I am sure ye be the best knight of the world. Then Sir Launcelot answered full soberly: Certes, sir, it is not my sword; also, Sir, wit ye well I have no hardiness to set my hand to it, for it longed not to hang by my side. Also, who that assayeth to take the sword and faileth of it, he shall receive a wound by that sword that he shall not be whole long after. And I will that ye wit that this same day shall the adventures of the Sangreal, that is called the Holy Vessel, begin."

The truth of Sir Launcelot's statement was soon confirmed. For scarcely was the sword in the hand of Galahad,

- 169 its rightful bearer, when there "came riding down the river a lady on a white palfrey".

- 169 "Then she saluted the king and the queen, and asked if that Sir Launcelot was there. And then he answered himself: I am here, fair lady. Then she said all with weeping: How your great doing is changed sith this day in the morn. Damosel, why say you so? said Sir Launcelot. I say you sooth, said the damosel, for ye were this day the best knight of the world, but who should say so now, he should be a liar, for there is now one better than ye, and well it is proved by the adventures of the sword whereto ye durst not set to your hand."

The holy quest proved for Sir Launcelot a long agony of
I - 186 shame and remorse. He was early overthrown by his son Gala-
had in disguise, and was granted no opportunity to retrieve
his fall. After suffering this mortification he "rode over-
II - 187 thwart and endlong in a wild forest, and held no path but as
wild adventure led him. And at the last he came to a stony
cross which departed two ways in waste land." Close by,
was an old chapel mysteriously lighted, and furnished with
II - 187 "a fair altar, full richly arrayed with cloth of clene silk,
and there stood a fair clean candlestick, which bare six great
candles, and the candlestick was of silver". But search as
he would, the baffled knight could find no way to effect an
entrance; so he "laid him down to sleep upon his shield to-
I - 188 fore the cross". Here "half waking and sleeping", he saw
the Holy Grail emerge from the chapel and heal a sick knight,
who was brought to the cross on a litter. But Sir Launcelot
- 188 "was overtaken with sin that he had no power to rise ageyne
the holy vessel". And still lying helpless, he saw the
strange knight appropriate his sword and his helmet, and ride
away on his horse.

- 189 "Then anon Sir Launcelot waked, and set him up, and be-
thought him what he had seen there, and whether it were dreams
or not. Right so heard he a voice that said: Sir Launcelot,
more harder than is the stone, and more bitter than is the
wood, and more naked and barer than is the leaf of the fig
tree: therefore go thou from hence, and withdraw thee from
this holy place. And when Sir Launcelot heard this he was
passing heavy and wist not what to do, and so departed sore

weeping, and cursed the time that he was born."

The cause of all these hard experiences Sir Launcelot knew full well, and to himself he now acknowledged it:

"And then he called himself a very wretch, and most un-
- 189 happy of all knights; and there he said: My sin and my wickedness have brought me unto great dishonour." But he went yet further. To a hermit, whom he chanced to meet, he made unreserved confession, beggirg him to interpret the words of the voice and give him counsel. The holy man dealt faithfully with him, but finding him truly repentant, granted him absolution. He then equipped him afresh and sent him on his way, inspired with new hope. Thoroughly humbled, the good knight resolved with all the power of his sin-weakened will,
- 208 that he would henceforth walk uprightly; and "he made his prayers unto the Cross that he never fall in deadly sin again".

But yet deeper humiliation lay just before him. For entering a tournament to help the weaker side, he met utter
- 211 defeat, and "all the fellowship of the castle were overcome for the default of him - - - . And then Sir Launcelot made great sorrow, For never or now was I never at tournament nor jousts but I had the best, and now I am shamed. - - - Now I am sure that I am more sinfuller than ever I was." When next he lay down to sleep, "him thought there came an old man afore
- 211 him, the which said: Ah, Launcelot of evil faith and poor belief, wherefore is thy will turned so lightly toward thy deadly sin? And when he had said thus he vanished away, and Launcelot wist not there he was become."

Thus by slow and painful degrees Sir Launcelot came to

understand the full enormity of his guilt. Refusing, however, to give way to despair, he applied himself to prayer and penance with a zeal which went far toward expiating his sin. Being partially purified at last, he was granted six months of sweet companionship with Galahad on a mystic ship in which
I - 255 they "served God daily and nightly with all their power". At the expiration of that time, Sir Galahad bade his father a fond farewell and resumed his active quest of the Grail.

I - 256 "And the wind arose, and drove Launcelot more than a month throughout the sea, where he slept but little, but prayed to God that he might see some tidings of the Sangreal." Reaching, at last, the postern gate of a castle, guarded by two lions, he heard a voice that said:

I - 256 "Launcelot, go out of this ship and enter into the castle, where thou shalt see a great part of thy desire." But one lesson he had yet to learn. With all his bitter experience, he had not grasped the fact that, in this quest, earthly weapons were of no avail. As he approached the lions he instinctively drew his sword.

I - 256 "Then there came a dwarf suddenly, and smote him on the arm so sore that the sword fell out of his hand. Then heard he a voice say: O man of evil faith and poor belief, wherefore trowest thou more on thy harness than in thy Maker, for He might more avail thee than thine armour, in whose service that thou art set. Then said Laurcelot: Fair Father Jesu Christ, I thank thee of Thy great mercy that Thou reprovest me of my misdeed; now see I well that ye hold me for your servant. Then took he again his sword and put it

up in his sheath, and made a cross in his forehead, and came to the lions, and they made semblant to do him harm. Notwithstanding he passed by them without hurt."

I - 257 At last he was fairly within the Grail castle; and he prayed humbly: "Fair sweet Father, Jesu Christ, if ever I did thing that pleased Thee, - - - show me something of that I seek." And "something" was indeed vouchsafed to him. But he was permitted to see the holy vessel only at a distance, and "covered with red samite". When he presumed to approach it more closely (though with the most knightly of motives), he was smitten in the face by a breath so fiery that he "lost the power of his body, and his hearing, and his seeing"; and

I - 258 for twenty-four days he lay as one dead, in "punishment for the four and twenty years that he had been a sinner".

The trials of Sir Launcelot differed in degree, rather than in kind, from those of others who pursued this quest. Past sin stood ever between them and their desired goal, and the bias of experience in worldly adventures hampered them at every turn. Sir Percivale was the purest of them all, with the exception of Sir Galahad. Yet even he lost heart,

- 198 when he found himself in a position from which he saw no means of escape. Betrayed by a fiend into a sea-girt mountain

- 200 country inhabited only by wild beasts, he was visited by an old man in a ship "covered within and without by white samite".

"Sir, said the old man, of whence be ye? Sir, said Sir Percivale, I am of Arthur's court, and a knight of the Table Round, the which am in the quest of the Sangreal; and here am I in great duresse, and never like to escape out of this wilder-

ness. Doubt not, said the good man, an ye be so true a knight as the order of chivalry requireth, and of heart as ye ought to be, ye should not doubt that none enemy should slay you. What are ye? said Sir Percivale. Sir, said the old man, I am of a strange country, and hither I come to comfort you."

Then the old man counselled and encouraged him, even as the hermit had Sir Launcelot. And Sir Percivale, too, found the sign of the cross his only effective weapon. This it was which saved him when the fiend took the form of a horse and attempted to bear him to destruction; this it was which again defeated the arch-tempter, when he assumed the guise of a distressed gentlewoman, and all but compassed the young knight's ruin.

Under such circumstances, Sir Galahad's lack of experience was plainly no disadvantage to him. In this undertaking success did not wait on knightly prowess. The essentially unearthly character of the whole Grail quest appears, indeed, in the fact that his preeminence was assured by superhuman endowment. When he investigated a tomb from which issued
I - 179 smoke and "a great noise", "he saw the foulest figure leap thereout that ever he saw in the likeness of a man; and then he blessed him and wist well it was a fiend. Then heard he a voice say: Galahad, I see there environ about thee so many angels that my power may not dare thee." And Sir Percivale
I - 193 was told plainly by his aunt, the recluse: "That same knight hath no peer, for he worketh all by miracle, and he shall never be overcome of none earthly man's hand."

It is obvious that this quest involved a complete re-

adjustment of knightly ideas and knightly ideals. The strong arm, the steady eye, the skilful stroke, were now of no avail. If valor was still a cardinal virtue, it was no longer a valor of the flesh; if treachery and cowardice were still despised, they had ceased to rank as the most deadly vices. Bewilderment must have reigned supreme, but for those holy men and holy women who served as prophets of the new moral order. They, and they alone, were able to elucidate the strange visions which haunted the knights of the quest. It is a significant fact that the interpreter was always at hand when occasion required; and he never failed to rede the riddle aright. He spoke with an authority so manifest that there could be no reasonable doubt that it was of God, and to his admonitions the knights gave earnest heed.

Before the beginning of the great adventure, Sir Percivale
I - 144 and Sir Ector had been healed of desperate wounds by the passing of the Grail. "Sir Percivale had a glimmering of the vessel and of the maiden that bare it;" and Sir Ector, though he appears to have seen nothing, immediately recognized the agent of their deliverance. "I wot full well, said Sir Ector, what it is; it is an holy vessel that is borne by a maiden, and therein is part of the holy blood of our Lord Jesu Christ, blessed mote he be. But it may not be seen, said Sir Ector, but if it be by a perfect man." Sir Gawaine's failure in the
- 219 holy quest was explained on precisely this ground: "I shall tell you gladly, said the good man; the adventure of the Sangreal which ye and many other have undertaken the quest of it and find it not, the cause is for it appeareth not to

sinners. Wherefore marvel not though ye fail thereof, and many other." Over and over again the confessors of the baffled knights declared to them the cause of their discomfiture. At last, too late, they grasped the truth. No worldly prowess could help them here, and their spiritual vitality had been sapped by the subtle poison of sin. Lack of faith, pride, and
I - 212 impurity of life had done their deadly work.

"This advision (said a recluse to Sir Launcelot) signifieth that thou were of evil faith and of poor belief, the which will make thee to fall into the deep pit of hell if thou keep
I - 215 thee not." To Sir Gawaine and Sir Ector "came down a voice which said: Knights of full evil faith and of poor belief, these two things have failed you, and therefore ye may not come to the adventures of the Sangreal. - - - Now go we, said Sir Ector, unto some hermit that will tell us of our advision, for it seemeth me we labour all in vain." When they laid their case before the holy Nacien, he did but reiterate the rebuke of the
I - 219 voice, and confirm its verdict: "Knights of poor faith and of wicked belief, - - - ye may not attain the high adventure of the Sangreal."

Though "poor faith" was the charge most frequently brought against the questers, pride was no less fatal to their enterprise. One old monk went so far as to describe it to
I - 182 Sir Melias as "the head of all deadly sins". "When the devil
I - 181 saw your pride and presumption (he declared), for to take you in the quest of the Sangreal, that made you to be overthrown, for it may not be achieved but by virtuous living." Sir Launcelot, in a vision, saw an old man descend from the clouds

and give his blessing to a party of praying knights; but to
I - 208 one he said: "I have lost all that I have set in thee, for thou hast ruled thee against me as a warrior, and used wrong wars with vain glory , more for the pleasure of the world than to please me, therefore thou shalt be confounded without thou yield me thy treasure." Sir Launcelot himself was repeatedly reproached for a like lust of glory. A recluse explained to him that the tournament in which he met his first defeat was in reality a struggle between good men and sinners, and that when he saw the sinners (i. e. the black knights) overcome,
I - 212 he was "inclined to that party for bobaunce and pride of the world". Nor was this the worst. "For great pride thou madest great sorrow that thou haddest not overcome all the white knights with the covering of white by whom was betokened virginity and chastity; and therefore God was wroth with you, for God loveth no such deeds in this quest."

Sir Launcelot's guilt was grievous indeed when he allied himself with the enemies of "chastity and virginity". For it would appear from Sir Gawaine's vision of the bulls that impurity of life was the one sin which shut out all possibility of success in the quest of the Grail.

I - 214 "Sir Gawaine him seemed he came into a meadow full of herbs and flowers, and there he saw a rack of bulls, an hundred and fifty, that were proud and black, save three of them were all white, and one had a black spot, and the other two were so fair and so white that they might be no whiter. And these three bulls which were so fair were tied with two strong cords. And the remnant of the bulls said among them: Go we hence to

seek better pasture. And so some went, and some came again, but they were so lean that they might not stand upright; and of the bulls that were so white, that one came again and no more."

Nacien's interpretation of this vision is so eloquent of the ideals, the mysticism, and the ecclesiasticism, of the Grail quest, that we quote it with but slight abridgement:

I - 217 "Sir, said the hermit unto Sir Gawaine, the fair meadow and the rack therein ought to be understood the Round Table, and by the meadow ought to be understood humility and patience, those be the things which be always green and quick; for men may no time overcome humility and patience, therefore was the Round Table founded. - - - By the bulls is to understand the fellowship of the Round Table, which for their sin and their wickedness be black. Blackness is to say without good or virtuous works. And the three bulls which were white save only one that was spotted: the two white betoken Sir Galahad and Sir Percivale, for they be maidens clene and without spot; and the third that had a spot signifieth Sir Bors de Ganis, which trespassed but once in his virginity, but sithen he kept himself so well in chastity that all is forgiven him and his misdeeds. And why those three were tied by the necks, they be three knights in virginity and chastity, and there is no pride smitten in them. And the black bulls which said: Go we hence, they were those which at Pentecost at the high feast took upon them to go in the quest of the Sangreal without confession: they might not enter in the meadow of humility and patience. And therefore they returned into waste countries,

that signifieth death, for there shall die many of them: every each of them shall slay other for sin, and they that shall escape shall be so lean that it shall be marvel to see them. And of the three bulls without spot, the one shall come again, and the other two never."

Here is the Round Table in its most highly spiritualized aspect - a mere wraith of that lusty fellowship whose renown once filled the world. Here, too, appear most of the cardinal virtues of these later days - humility, patience, chastity, confession. But the list is not quite complete. In explaining to Sir Hector and Sir Gawaine their failure in the
I - 219 quest, Nacien declared, "These three things failed, charity, abstinence and truth." And the old man who came to comfort Sir Percivale, interpreted certain features of a dream as be-
I - 200 tokening "the new law of holy church, that is to understand, faith, good hope, belief, and baptism".

The whole Grail legend bears the unmistakable stamp of "holy church". The mass, confession and extreme unction are prominent features; and solemn religious admonitions, even expositions of formal theology, are of frequent occurrence. But ecclesiasticism, in its baldest form, asserts itself in
- 264 that mystic communion which "Joseph, the first bishop of
- 265 Christendom", administered in the castle of Carbonek. "Then the bishop made semblant as though he would have gone to the sacring of the mass. And then he took an ubblye which was made in likeness of bread. And at the lifting up there came a figure in likeness of a child, and the visage was as red and as bright as any fire, and smote himself into the bread,

so that they all saw it that the bread was formed of a fleshly man; and then he put it into the holy vessel again, and ther he did that longed to a priest to do to a mass."

. p. 143 It is also (as we believe, Miss Weston notwithstanding) in fulfilment of theological dogma, that Galahad no longer desires to remain on earth, when his spiritual quest has been achieved. In him the eternal conflict between the spirit and the flesh has been carried to a triumphant close, and henceforth the flesh can be only a useless impediment.

I - 266-267 "And Galahad fell in his prayer long time to Our Lord, that at what time he asked, that he should pass out of this world. So much he prayed till a voice said to him: Galahad, thou shalt have thy request; and when thou askest the death of thy body thou shalt have it, and then shalt thou find the life of the soul. Percivale heard this and prayed him, of fellowship that was between them, to tell him wherefore he asked such things. That shall I tell you, said Galahad; the other day when we saw a part of the adventures of the Sangreal I was in such a joy of heart, that I trow never man was that was earthly. And therefore I wot well, when my body is dead my soul shall be in great joy to see the blessed Trinity every day, and the majesty of Our Lord, Jesu Christ."

We have said that the quest of the Grail constitutes the spiritual climax of the Morte Darthur. Yet despite its lofty ideality this story of the holy quest is not altogether satisfying from an ethical standpoint. Maynadier is somewhat severe in his strictures upon that version of the Grail legend which centers in Sir Galahad. He believes that that hero owes

re Arthur of the English Poets 131

his very existence to some writer with "his head full of the monkish confusion of celibacy with chastity, who found it difficult to forget the wife or mistress whom the earlier stories had given Perceval". He finds that "though holy according to mediaeval standards, he is often selfish according to ours", and remarks, in this connection, that "Perceval's sister, who died from loss of her own blood that a sick lady might be healed, had a better right to the Grail than Galahad, according to modern Christianity". He maintains, in short, that "the fault of the ethical teaching in the romances of which Galahad was the hero was - - - that no one profited so much by the achievement of the Grail as the successful quester"; and Galahad himself, though "beautiful in his innocence and admirable in his unswerving quest of that vessel which typified the monastic ideal of the Middle Ages", he declares to be "nevertheless unhuman and unnatural".

Ibid. 154

Ibid. 134

Ibid. 382

Ibid. 136

All this we must perhaps grant. It would doubtless be difficult to prove Sir Galahad a man of like passions with his fellows: it would certainly be impossible to find either altruism or practical utility in the Grail quest. In point of unselfish service to humanity, the Round Table fellowship appears to at least as good advantage in its more worldly days. Its early vows were calculated to direct the good knight's thought outside himself, and to make his sword available for redressing human wrong. With his entrance upon the quest of the Grail, he became morbidly introspective, and his chief concern was henceforth the pursuit of a sort of spiritual will-o'-the-wisp, in which he was foredoomed to almost certain

failure. We miss, moreover, in these questers a certain virility which is one of the most marked characteristics of the worldly knight. When glory waited upon distinguished prowess in arms, the knight flung himself into the adventure of life with bold and free abandon. When, on the contrary, he found all earthly weapons futile, all fierce endeavor vain, he developed a timorous meekness which ill befitted his knightly calling. Having ventured into a realm where he was not at home, he became almost pitifully subservient to the only guides who seemed competent to direct his steps.

There are, finally, certain evidences of moral obtuseness which are not easily reconciled with the exalted spirituality of the Grail quest. Sir Melias, riding through the country, came upon a lodge of boughs, in which he found a
- 180 crown of gold and many rich viands. "Sir Melias beheld this adventure, and thought it marvellous, but he had no hunger, but of the crown of gold he took much keep; and therewith he stooped down and took it up, and rode his way with it. And anon he saw a knight came riding after him and said: Knight, set down that crown which is not yours, and therefore defend you. Then Sir Melias blessed him and said: Fair lord of heaven, help and save thy new-made knight." Though he was later rebuked and punished for this theft, it seems evident that his own conscience failed to warn him of any guilt in the matter.

But this is not the most surprising instance of failure
p. 145 to distinguish between mine and thine. We have seen that
- 188 Sir Launcelot witnessed the healing of a sick knight by the

Holy Grail, while he himself lay helpless," overtaken with sin". The healed man devoutly returned thanks for the blessing conferred upon him, and gave every evidence of piety. He even exchanged with his squire conjectures as to the cause of Launcelot's impotent condition in presence of the holy vessel. Yet he apparently felt no compunctions in carrying off the property of one who was unable to defend his own rights. It will be remembered that he took Sir Launcelot's
I - 188 helm and shield -- and his horse, because "he was better than his"! It is difficult to see wherein lay this knight's superior claim to the benefits of the Grail.

All this might appear to indicate that the quest of the Grail represents chivalry in the sear and yellow leaf, rather than chivalry in the fulness of its bloom. But this is a case where we may be easily misled by outward seeming. This story must be judged, like all else, in the light of the age which produced it. Mediaeval religion found its characteristic expression in withdrawal from the world, not in social service; its best energies went into the subjugation of the flesh, not into the development of all-round manhood and womanhood. Its view of life seems narrow, selfish, inadequate, from the standpoint of the twentieth century; but to the centuries which had seen no higher vision (or which saw no hope for higher achievement), it was vital and satisfying.

Sartor esartus 197-'8 "The curtains of Yesterday drop down (says Carlyle), the curtains of Tomorrow roll up; but Yesterday and Tomorrow both <u>are</u>. Pierce through the Time-element, glance into the Eternal."

Sartor Resartus 56

Again - "It is written, the Heavens and the Earth shall fade away like a Vesture; which indeed they are: the Time-vesture of the Eternal. Whatsoever sensibly exists, whatsoever represents Spirit to Spirit, is properly a Clothing, a suit of Raiment, put on for a season, and to be laid off."

The asceticism and ecclesiasticism of the quest of the Grail are but a mediaeval vesture; its soul is a sublime consecration. As the earlier Round Table fellowship represented the service of man to man, as the earthly quest betokened self-immolation for a desired end; so the holy quest symbolized, to those who first conceived it, dedication to their highest spiritual ideal. This is its undying glory. Despite all flaws and all deficiencies, it stands a monument to the unquenchable faith of the human spirit that "the things which are not seen are eternal", and that the goal of the soul's quest lies beyond the limits of space and time.

Cor. IV-18

CHAPTER XI.

Conclusion.

"Es ist kein leerer, schmeichelnder Wahn,
Erzeugt im Gehirne des Thoren.
Im Herzen kündet es laut sich an:
Zu was Besserm sind wir geboren;
Und was die innere Stimme spricht,
Das täuscht die hoffende Seele nicht."

(Schiller: Hoffnung.)

Ency. Brit. XI - 496

In the Morte Darthur we have "an abridged compilation of the great body of Arthurian romance in its latest form"; in other words, we have a composite which represents the accumulation of many centuries about a name of peculiarly strong magnetic power. The Arthurian legend proper (technically known as the Matière de Bretagne) was long in developing, and scholars tell us that it embodies mythic, romantic, and fairy elements, in addition to a probable nucleus of historic fact. Sir Tristram and Sir Launcelot represent independent cycles of romance which have no original connection with the Arthurian; and the quest of the Grail (at least in the version used by Malory) we have seen to be a distinctly French importation. These are only the more conspicuous of the manifold elements which are woven into the fabric of the Morte Darthur, but they will suffice to indicate how divers are the threads to which it owes the depth and richness of its coloring.

The great mediaeval romances are all, like the Arthurian,

products of slow growth. They are never the work of one man, or of one generation of men. Springing, like a folk-song, from the soil, each one enshrines the triumphs, the enthusiasms, the aspirations of a people; and each reflects the ideal of the age which gave it birth. While Malory took large liberties with his heterogeneous material, we have seen that he took small pains, if any, to reduce it to consistency. The more virile elements of his narrative have therefore retained much of their individuality, the animating spirit of each shining clearly through its thin disguise. Three distinct ideals are thus traceable in his work:

1.) The ideal of the warrior;

2.) The ideal of the courtier;

3.) The ideal of the churchman.

To one or another of these may be ascribed, we believe, all that is morally vital in the Morte Darthur; and to each is chargeable one flagrant defect in the knightly character.

It is needless to say that no one of these ideals can be entirely isolated from the other two. All three are operative, in varying degrees, throughout the book. Malory knows no limits of time or place, and knights of different lands and different ages jostle one another indiscriminately in his tales. Customs, manners and morals they here hold, to a great extent, in common, and it is only as we seek the source of their amazing inconsistency, that we become aware of the conflicting ideals which they represented in the beginning.

Tennyson, in The Holy Grail, describes a mighty hall, "the stateliest under heaven", with which Merlin crowned "the

sacred mount of Camelot".

The Holy Grail 32-239

"And four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt
With many a mystic symbol, gird the hall;
And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,
And in the second men are slaying beasts,
And on the third are warriors, perfect men,
And on the fourth are men with growing wings,
And over all one statue in the mould
Of Arthur."

In other words, the great magician pictured there the successive stages of man's conquest of the earth and the earthy. In the first, primitive man is the victim of a rampant brute creation which threatens his very existence; in the second, the tables are turned and the brute must fight for his life; in the third, man's energies are freed to war against his brother man; in the fourth, his battles at an end, he is already putting off "the image of the earthy" for "the image of the heavenly". The transition from the third stage of this struggle to the triumph of the fourth constitutes the spiritual theme of the Morte Darthur.

It is not without significance that Tennyson singles out the warriors as the "perfect men" in Merlin's sculptured adornment. This would seem fairly to represent Merlin's own standpoint; for the one fact which is generally admitted to be true of the original Arthur, is that he was a distinguished warrior. "The truth - - - appears to be that, while there was never a King Arthur, there was a noted chieftain and general of

Hist. Brit. 1 - 681

that name. If we say that he carried on a successful war against the Saxons, was probably betrayed by his wife and a near kinsman, and fell in battle, we have stated all which can be claimed for an historical nucleus for his legend." It

follows, therefore, that the Matière de Bretagne represents the ideal of the fighter. To this ideal belong all the more rugged virtues of chivalry: valor, perseverance, self-reliance, fidelity, simplicity. But the calling of the warrior tends to one appalling vice. The humanitarian instinct gives way, on the field of battle, to a savage lust for blood, and the successful warrior is inured to all manner of cruelty. He becomes, in the end, so callous to the sight of suffering that brutality ceases to offend him. Thus he accepts, as a matter of course, much that is flagrantly shocking from any standpoint but his own. Malory's knights are sad examples of this demoralization, and even his ladies show the hardening effect of the sports which they applauded.

A certain brutality is, indeed, inherent in chivalry. Grievous wounds were often inflicted even in friendly encounters, and knightly distinction could be achieved and maintained only at the price of constant bloodshed. When Sir Tristram's mother lay dying she desired to look upon her
- 239 new-born child. "And when she saw him she said thus: Ah, my little son, thou hast murdered thy mother, and therefore I suppose, thou that art a murderer so young, thou art full likely to be a manly man in thine age." This is a hard saying, yet with slight modification, it implies no unjust indictment of knighthood. Between manliness and legalized (often unavoidable) slaughter, there was a connection which none might hope to escape. The harsh necessities of the knightly life developed a strain of savagery in the noblest and the gentlest. It was no other than Sir Gareth, the

model of all chivalric virtue, who, having struck off the
- 216 head of a knight, "hewed (it) in an hundred pieces - - - and threw them out at the window into the ditches of the castle". And over the body of Boudwin, who died a victim to King Mark's
I - 26 jealousy, there sounds the lament: "Alas, for his goodness and for his good deeds this gentle prince Boudwin was slain." But that which had roused the king's ire, was the popularity accruing to the "gentle prince" and his fellowship when they slew forty thousand Saracens and "left none on live"!

We have seen that the Arthurian cycle probably originated in the deeds of a mighty chieftain who for a time offered successful resistance to the Saxon invaders of Britain. But his cause was doomed to failure. The Saxon and his Teutonic kinsmen swept all before them in the end, and for some five hundred years they maintained their supremacy. But they, in their turn, were destined to learn the meaning of defeat and servitude. The first half of the eleventh century brought them under Danish lordship, and the second half saw their final subjugation by William of Normandy.

With the Norman came all the pomp of heraldry, and England underwent a rapid transformation. The court of the Norman kings reflected the voluptuousness and artificiality of the life of continental potentates; and from the court as a center, French influence radiated in ever widening circles. The French language, French literature, French etiquette gradually became predominant among educated men and women. The mailed fist, though not withdrawn, was partially concealed beneath rich trappings, and in course

of time, the old ideal of the warrior gave place to the ideal of the courtier.

As the new ideal rose to the ascendent, the rude ways of the warrior appeared more and more incongruous. A certain outward grace of manner and deportment became indispensable even to the fighting-man, and in his contact with cultured society, there was evolved that noble courtesy which plays so large a part in the life of Malory's knights. In so far as the knightly courtesy represented magnanimity and largeness of soul, its germ had undoubtedly struck root in the earliest days of chivalry. But it had put forth its first shoots in an atmosphere by no means conducive to healthy growth; to the Normans belongs the honor of bringing it to the fulness of its bloom. This was their supreme service in the development of the chivalric ideal. But French refinement unfortunately brought with it French corruption.

It is a well known fact that the element of love between the sexes came into English literature by way of the Norman, and it is therefore peculiarly regrettable that the Norman conception of woman was not a more worthy one: we find it fairly represented in the illicit loves of Tristram and Isoud, and of Launcelot and Guenever. Having already discussed this subject in chapter V, we need not here enlarge upon it further. The Morte Darthur is poisoned from cover to cover by the moral abominations of the so-called "Courts of Love". They constitute the one really debasing element in the book, and admit of neither palliation nor excuse. As brutality was the vice of the warrior, so the degradation of woman was that of the

Norman courtier.

The licentiousness of the court worked itself out to its logical conclusion, and woman became the symbol of all that is "of the earth, earthy". Accordingly, when the minds of men turned to spiritual things, they saw in her only a peril to be shunned. This appears with uncompromising clearness in the message delivered to Arthur's knights, on the day when they pledged themselves to the great quest: "Fair lords, which have sworn in the quest of the Sangreal, thus sendeth you Nacien, the hermit, word, that none in this quest lead lady nor gentlewoman with him, for it is not to do in so high a service as they labour in; for I warn you plain, he that is not clean of his sins he shall not see the mysteries of our Lord Jesu Christ." And Maynadier says that "no medieval monk, however ascetic, could have been more firmly convinced than Galahad that women were put into this world to tempt men from the paths of virtue".

I - 173

e Arthur of the English Poets 136

The third, or ecclesiastical, ideal represents therefore the revolt against worldliness and self-indulgence, the determination to forsake "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life". Men became absorbed in the welfare of their own souls. Chastity, piety, faith, humility - these were the virtues which now assumed preeminence. In the quest of the Grail we have the perfect embodiment of this ideal. But though the holy quest registers the spiritual high-water mark of chivalry, we have found it morally lacking in one important respect. It is absolutely self-centered. Consumed by their zeal to escape the world's pollution, the questers

John :16

turned a deaf ear to the cry of the world's need. Precisely at this point lies the fault in the ecclesiastical ideal of the Middle Ages. Because it failed to give due weight to the second great commandment, its piety was largely robbed of practical significance.

Brutality, the degradation of woman, and selfish preoccupation with personal interests - these are the conspicuous flaws which vitiate the morality of the knights of the Morte Darthur. They are patent to the most casual reader, and they cannot be set aside as of slight consequence. It should, however, be noted that the knightly moral code never gave to any one of them its formal sanction. As opposed to brutality, it demanded courtesy, generosity, magnanimity and mercy; over against woman's practical degradation, it set a theoretical exaltation which has never been surpassed; against selfishness, it urged disinterested service to the ladies, to the weak, and to the helpless. In other words, the ideal almost always rang true. But the flesh was weak, the understanding was warped, the vision was narrow.

What then have we found of positive excellence, to offset the grave defects of the knightly code? Let us summarize first those fundamental moral conceptions which Carlyle declares to be the determinants of action. We have seen that these knights had certain definite convictions regarding God, the world, and their own souls:

1.) They saw "in the beginning, God". They lived in a world created, upheld, and continually ruled by a God sufficiently powerful even to "foredo destiny".

2.) They lived in a righteous world, governed by inexorable moral law. Sooner or later their sin was bound to find them out and bring its own punishment. Their virtue was no less sure of its ultimate reward.

3.) Their God intended every life to be significant; hence "great adventures" must be actively sought, if they came not of themselves.

4.) They were keenly conscious of an all-enveloping mystery in which lay illimitable possibilities, both for this world and for the world to come.

5.) They recognized that it therefore behooved them to fix their faith on God, and live as in his sight.

The many noble virtues which belonged to the chivalric ideal may be grouped under four heads, as follows:

1.) Devotion to duty, implying:

Valor
Self-reliance
Perseverance
Self-denial

2.) Strict integrity, implying:

Sincerity
Fidelity
a.) to one's promise
b.) " " friends
Justice (Fair play)

3.) Consideration for others, implying:

Courtesy
Gentleness
Magnanimity
Generosity
Mercy

4.) Piety, implying:

Faith
Humility
(Chastity)

No single knight ever fulfilled this ideal unless it were Galahad, who was both more, and less, than human. Sir Launcelot is the most satisfactory exponent of the knightly ideal, barring the one grievous blot which mars his character. Chastity and the distinctly religious virtues attain to full significance only in the holy quest; but the knight's devotion to duty is inspiring, his sense of honor is magnificent, his courtesy is fine beyond compare. These three virtues chivalry brought to a high state of perfection in every true knight.

In view of the singularly composite character of the Morte Darthur we questioned, in the beginning, whether there could be any basic code of honor valid for the work as a whole. This doubt has proved to be not altogether ungrounded. Our study has revealed a moral fabric as complex as the romance itself. Though we have found certain well defined principles of conduct which are fundamental to the knightly life, we are forced to admit that we have established no comprehensive moral code to which all knights are amenable at all times. Inconsistency is here, as everywhere in the Morte Darthur; but the truth would seem to be that the vitality of Malory's moral code lies in its very complexity and contradictions. Its brutality, lust, and selfishness are grounded deep in the elemental passions of man's animal nature; its rugged practical virtues appeal, in heroic wise, to his moral sense; its all-pervasive mysticism represents the groping, but persistent, faith of his

spiritual instinct. In other words, it challenges the whole man; it reflects the whole struggle whereby he rises from the clod to a son of the Most High.

It will be remembered that Merlin found in this conflict the motive for his decoration of Arthur's hall. And over all he set

he Holy Grail 18-245

> "One statue in the mould
> Of Arthur - - - - - - - - - - - - with a crown,
> And peak'd wings pointed to the Northern Star.
> And eastward fronts the statue, and the crown
> And both the wings are made of gold, and flame
> At sunrise till the people in far fields,
> Wasted so often by the heathen hordes,
> Behold it, crying, 'We have still a king.'"

In this glorified Arthur harassed and disheartened men saw the promise of better days to be. The Arthur of the Morte Darthur goes down in defeat before his enemies. But why? Because by the sin of his youth he has offended God. His fall is a direct vindication of the moral law, a demonstration of the reality and the sovereignty of the spiritual world. Arthur may perish, his Round Table may be broken; but God lives and the powers of evil shall not prevail. It is the sureness of this conviction which, in the last analysis, gives abiding significance to the moral code of the Morte Darthur.

OUTLINE AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER I.

William Caxton and Sir Thomas Malory.

I. Introduction: The 15th century a period of transition.

A. Comparison of Italy and Northern Europe in the 15th century.

B. The 14th century in England.

1. A few great names, e. g. Wyclif and Chaucer.

2. Prevailing illiteracy, and scarcity and inaccessibility of books.

C. The 15th century in England.

1. Barrenness in the realm of creative literature.

2. Significance as the century of transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.

II. William Caxton - the first English printer.

A. Early life and commercial success.

B. Literary activity in Bruges.

1. Abortive attempt to translate Le Receuil des Histoires de Troyes.

2. Turning point in his career.

3. Success as translator and printer.

a. Translation of Le Receuil des Histoires de Troyes, and its popularity.

b. Collaboration with Colard Mansion in publication of above.

c. Translation and publication of The Game and Playe of Chesse.

C. Return to England and later life.

1. Remarkable output as translator and printer.

2. Publication of Malory's Morte Darthur.

III. Who was Sir Thomas Malory? (monograph by George Lyman Kittredge.)

A. Conditions to be fulfilled by any claimant to authorship of the Morte Darthur.

B. Above conditions fulfilled by Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revell (or Fenny Revell), M. P. for Warwickshire in 1445.

C. Probable identification of the above with "Thomas Malorie miles", active in Wars of the Roses.

D. Refutation of Prof. Rhys's theory that Malory was a Welshman.

IV. Conclusion: Authorship and preservation of the Morte Darthur.

CHAPTER II.

The Morte Darthur.

I. Introduction: Publication of the Morte Darthur a response to public demand.

II. Caxton's original Preface.

A. Hesitation to publish Morte Darthur because of doubt of historicity of Arthur.

B. Consent to publish same for its undoubted merits - especially ethical quality.

III. Extraordinary ethical vitality of the Morte Darthur.

A. Influence on successive generations of English poets.

B. Spiritual quality - the secret of its power.

1. Recognized by Caxton.

2. Evidenced by role of Arthurian tales in modern English literature.

a. Tendency to idealization, e. g. in Tennyson's Round Table.

b. High inspirational power despite moral contradictions.

IV. Inconsistencies of the Morte Darthur.

A. Confusion of fact, e. g. in stories of Galahad and Lamorak.

B. Incongruities of character, e. g. in Gawaine and Arthur.

C. Ground of inconsistencies in composite character of the book.

V. Conclusion:

A. Study of moral code of the Morte Darthur justified by its history.

B. Theme of present dissertation.

CHAPTER III.

The Moral World of Chivalry - Fundamental Conceptions.

I. Introduction:

A. Carlyle's definition of religion.

B. Practical basis of knightly science, philosophy and religion.

II. The religion (in Carlyle's sense) of Malory's knights.

A. A genuine religion - not a "no-religion".

1. Belief in God:

a. Directly proved by knightly word and deed.

b. Inherent in the romantic spirit.

2. Belief in the significance of human life.

3. Faith - a fundamental principle.

B. Distinctly Christian in form.

1. Importance attached to orthodox faith.

2. Overemphasis of Christian element in Grail portion of the book:

a. Grail itself perhaps of pagan origin.

b. High spiritual tone of Grail portion not characteristic of book as a whole.

C. The moral order essentially righteous.

1. God with the just cause - against the unjust.

a. Disquieting exceptions to this rule.

b. Vengeance as vindication of the moral order.

(1.) Knightly idea of vengeance as opposed to Christian.

(2.) Vengeance a sacred duty.

2. Sin and retribution inseparable.

3. Fatalism.

a. Nature of fate - God's decree.

b. Mingled fatalism and piety in idea of trial by jousts.

4. Magic - a disturbing element.

a. Natural in a world of romance.

b. Limited in power.

V. Apparent disparity between knightly faith and knightly works.

CHAPTER IV.

The Political and Social Order of the Morte Darthur.

I. The realm of Arthur - Extent, political organization, etc.

A. Establishment of his authority:

1. At home

2. Abroad - even to Rome.

B. Feudal organization of his realm.

1. Arthur, a great overlord.

2. Many lesser kings, each with his own court.

C. Alliance with courts of France.

II. The realm of Arthur - Social organization.

A. The world of chivalry a gentlefolk's world.

B. The classes of society in their mutual relations:

1. Kings and queens - no special immunities because of exalted rank.

2. The knightly fraternity.

a. Organization and class spirit.

b. Significance for the commonweal.

(1.) Vows of the Round Table knights.

(2.) Limited scope of vows and hence of knightly service.

(3.) Actual service to the state.

c. Religious spirit and practice.

3. Hermits, "holy men", etc.

a. Divers sorts, and varied manner of life.

b. The hermit Bishop of Canterbury and his monastic circle.

4. Dwarfs, and other knightly attendants.

a. Relationship of the dwarf to his master.

b. Squires of higher degree.

5. Yeomen and villains (commons).

a. Obscurity and lack of consideration in society.

b. Occasional self-assertion.

c. Helplessness and appreciation of knightly protection.

C. The family as a social group.

1. The chivalric system unfavorable to family life.

2. Blood-bond nevertheless strong:

a. Between brothers.

b. Among relatives of more remote degree.

3. Pride of birth.

D. Conclusion: Spirit of the social world of chivalry.

CHAPTER V.

Woman: Her Exaltation and her Degradation under Chivalry.

I. Introduction: Chivalry defined.

A. Chivalry scarcely definable without reference to woman.

B. Definition of the Standard Dictionary.

II. Ideal exaltation of woman in the Morte Darthur.

A. Every sword dedicated to woman.

B. Obligation to woman absolute, regardless of justice of her cause.

C. Every knight a lover.

D. Love the inspiration to great deeds.

III. Actual degradation of woman under chivalry.

A. The testimony of history (Prof. Coulton).

B. The testimony of the Morte Darthur.

1. Sagwarides' estimate of woman.

2. Arthur's estimate of woman.

3. Woman as personal property:

a. Offered as prize of joust.

b. Given as "boon" to stranger.

C. The Morte Darthur fairly representative of older romances in this respect.

IV. Prevailing immorality of the Morte Darthur:

A. Among the women.

B. Among the men.

V. Inconsistency regarding maidenly virtue.

A. Theory and practice in respect to chastity.

B. Spiritual blindness due to sin possible explanation of many riddles, e. g.

1. "Unclene" birth of Galahad and Arthur.

2. Sir Persant's temptation of Beaumains.

VI. Love and marriage among Malory's knights.

A. Wedlock not a bond of paramount importance.

B. Pure devotion only in exceptional cases.

C. Illicit love the rule.

1. The three great love stories of the Morte Darthur:

a. Launcelot and Guenever (Arthur's wife).

b. Tristram and Isoud (Mark's wife).

c. Lamorak and Margawse (Lot's wife).

2. Conspicuous fidelity only in illicit love.

D. "L'amour courtois" - reflected in the Morte Darthur.

1. Its origin.

2. Its nature and laws.

3. The reductio ad absurdum of the woman cult of chivalry.

VII. The freedom of woman under chivalry.

A. Freedom of intercourse with men at home and abroad.

1. Unmarried women.

a. Ubiquity of wandering maidens.

b. Cause and manner of their leaving home.

2. Married women.

a. Restraint imposed by marriage vows.

b. Large liberty in social intercourse.

B. Offices performed by women.

VIII. Conclusion: Chivalric ideal lofty but ineffective in conduct.

CHAPTER VI.

The Making of a Knight.

I. Introduction: The mother's sacrifice.

II. The question of birth.

A. Knighthood the only career for the high-born.

B. Knighthood, under handicap, possible for the low-born.

1. The case of Sir Tor.

a. Presented to Arthur as son of a cow-herd.

b. Examined by Arthur.

c. Knighted by Arthur.

d. Noble blood probably guessed by Arthur.

2. Many "low-born" knights probably of similar birth.

III. Education for knighthood.

A. Lack of education a serious handicap.

B. The education of Sir Tristram (Training for knighthood at its best).

1. Study of French and knightly arts in France.

2. Study of music, hunting, etc. at home.

3. Prolonged companionship with an experienced knight.

C. Older knights' share in the training of recruits.

1. Spirit of this service as expressed by Tennyson.

2. Solicitude of older knights for younger.

a. Launcelot and Lavaine.

b. Launcelot and Beaumains.

(1.) Launcelot's unfailing kindness.

(2.) The joust with Beaumains.

(3.) The fight on foot.

(4.) Generous recognition of Beaumains' prowess.

c. Plenorius and La Cote Male Taile.

IV. Requirements for knighthood.

A. No prescribed age.

B. Positive requirements.

1. Fitness of body.

2. Fitness of spirit.

3. Active desire for knighthood.

C. Declaration of identity usual requirement.

V. The ceremony of knighting.

A. Similarity to christening.

B. Obligation of participants to grant one another's first request.

VI. Conclusion: The position of the new-made knight.

CHAPTER VII.

Fundamentals of the Knightly Ideal.

I. Introduction:

A. Sir Launcelot's eulogy of Sir Gareth.

B. This eulogy as a compendium of knightly virtue.

II. The two paramount virtues of chivalry.

A. Truth (fidelity) supreme.

1. Directly proved by:

a. Emphasis in Launcelot's eulogy.

b. Emphasis throughout the Morte Darthur.

2. Indirectly proved by overwhelming scorn of falsity, treason, etc.

B. Valor comparably important.

1. Proved by scorn of cowardice.

2. A sine qua non of all knightly success.

III. Passive and friendly virtues.

A. Their importance and scope.

B. The virtues in detail:

1. Courtesy (preeminent).
2. Generosity (scarcely distinguishable from courtesy.)
   a. Bountcousness toward inferiors.
   b. Mercy toward the defeated and helpless.
3. Humility.
4. Magnanimity and Kindliness.

IV. Side-lights on the knightly ideal.
   A. Suggestions from various eulogies.
   B. Attitude toward woman - Cf. chap. V.

V. Summary: Sir Ector's eulogy of Sir Launcelot.

CHAPTER VIII.

The knightly Calling.

I. Introduction:
   A. Human institutions rooted in human needs.
   B. The origin of chivalry.
   C. The justification of the knightly calling.

II. The spirit of the knightly service.
   A. Supreme devotion.
      1. Honor or death:
         a. As interpreted by Beaumains.
         b. As understood by Tristram.
      2. Honor in death at the hands of a doughty adversary.
      3. Honor not always incompatible with survival of defeat.

E. Hardiness.

1. Admirable in the physical realm.

2. Lacking in the emotional realm.

III. The chivalric code of honor.

A. Underlying ideals already discussed - Cf. chap. VII.

B. Fighting the general business of knighthood:

1. Chance encounters among knights errant.

2. Vengeance in the world of chivalry.

C. Specific obligations of knighthood.

1. Defence of personal honor and honor of friends.

a. Personal insult necessarily punished.

b. Personal honor and honor of friends inseparable.

(1.) Opposition of friends in festive tournaments permissible.

(2.) Mutual support in time of need imperative.

2. Support of the cause of the ladies - Cf. chap. V.

3. Support of the cause of the weak, the wronged, the oppressed.

a. Impulse to help the weak the essence of chivalry.

b. Round Table knights the foes of all evil and oppression.

D. The law of fair play:

1. With respect to the unarmed.

2. " " " " sleeping.

3. " " " " prostrate.

4. " " " " fool.

5. With respect to the outnumbered.

6. " " " " overwearied.

E. The knightly word of honor.

1. Its sacred character.

a. Word freely accepted between enemies.

b. Word irrevocable when once passed.

2. Exceptions to strict integrity.

a. Right to assume disguise.

b. Other forms of deceit as means to an end.

IV. The knightly courtesy.

A. Its nature and scope.

B. Its practical application:

1. Between knights before conflict.

2. Between knights after conflict.

3. Extended to cover a quixotic sense of honor.

4. In hospitality.

V. Summary.

CHAPTER IX.

The Knightly Quest.

I. Introduction: The Round Table as a mounted police.

II. Purpose and nature of the knightly quest.

III. The three quests of Arthur's wedding-feast.

A. The "adventure" from which they took rise.

B. Sir Gawaine's quest of the white hart.

1. Faithfully fulfilled, but

2. Marred by cruelty.

C. Sir Tor's quest of the knight with the brachet.

1. Followed with unswerving devotion.

2. Completely successful.

D. King Pellinore's quest of the lady and the knight.

1. Followed with intense zeal.

2. Successful, but

3. Disastrous because of refusal to aid distressed gentlewoman.

IV. The sacredness of the quest.

A. The case of Palomides and the brother of King Hermance.

1. Both willing to fight for inviolability of quest.

2. The weaker willing to surrender quest to the stronger.

B. The quest of a dying knight.

C. Palomides' quest of the "glasting beast".

1. The beast described.

2. Palomides' devotion to this quest.

3. Uniqueness of this quest.

4. Possible spiritual significance of this quest.

V. The quest of the Grail.

A. A natural product of the age of chivalry.

B. The consummation of the knightly quest.

CHAPTER X.

The Quest of the Holy Grail.

I. Introduction: Transformation of the Round Table Knights.

II. Relation of the Grail portion of the Morte Darthur to the rest of the book.

A. Malory's Grail story a translation of a French romance complete in itself.

B. The Grail story not logically essential to Malory's development of the Arthurian legend.

C. The Grail story the spiritual climax of the Morte Darthur.

III. The Grail story prior to the quest (Books XI and XII).

A. Birth of Galahad foretold.

B. Sir Launcelot at the castle of Corbin.

C. Sir Gawaine at the castle of Corbin.

D. Sir Bors at the castle of Corbin.

E. Elaine's visit with the child Galahad to Arthur's court.

F. The christening of Sir Palomides and the coming of Galahad.

IV. The world of the Grail quest.

A. Natural law, standards and ideals displaced by spiritual.

B. Knighthood endued with religious dignity.

C. Shape of the Round Table declared symbolic and its fellowship directly connected with the quest.

D. The quest itself purely idealistic.

V. Launcelot in quest of the Grail.

A. Theory of Miss Weston.

B. Launcelot's gradual loss of prestige.

1. His own confession that he is not the best knight of the world.

2. Maiden's formal announcement that he is no longer the best knight of the world.

3. Two humiliating experiences.

4. Confession of sinfulness and absolution.

5. First defeat in a tournament.

C. Launcelot's partial success in the quest.

1. Expiation of sin, and its reward.

2. Final lesson in faith before the castle of the Grail.

3. Reward of his virtue and punishment of his sin.

VI. Essentially spiritual character of the Grail quest.

A. Futility of worldly experience and earthly weapons.

B. Galahad's superhuman endowment.

C. Holy men as interpreters.

D. Sin the cause of failure.

1. Lack of faith.

2. Pride.

3. Impurity of life.

VII. Moral and religious ideals of the quest.

A. The cardinal virtues.

B. Ecclesiasticism.

1. Church sacraments, expositions of doctrine, etc.
2. Galahad's death in fulfilment of theological dogma.

VIII. Ethical defects in Malory's Grail story.

A. Maynadier's strictures on the Galahad version of the quest legend.

B. Unfortunate effects of the quest on the Round Table knights.

C. Unaccountable moral obtuseness in questers.

IX. Conclusion: True significance of the Grail quest.

A. Outward form of the Grail quest a reflection of the mediaeval religious ideal.

B. Its soul spiritual consecration and aspiration.

CHAPTER XI.

Conclusion.

I. Introduction:

A. Varied elements combined in the Morte Darthur.

B. Three distinct ideals therefore distinguishable.

II. The spiritual theme of the book - the upward struggle of man.

III. The ideal of the warrior.

A. Ideal of the Matière de Bretagne.

B. Brutality its vice.

IV. The ideal of the (Norman) courtier.

A. Ideal of the Tristram and Launcelot cycles.

B. Degradation of woman its vice.

V. The ideal of the churchman.

A. Ideal of the Quête du Saint Graal.

B. Selfishness its vice.

VI. Summary of the composite code.

A. Its vices as above indicated.

B. Its positive excellences:

1. Convictions regarding God, the world and the human soul.

2. Virtues belonging to the knightly ideal.

VII. Conclusion:

A. Complexity of Malory's moral code the secret of its human appeal.

B. Hope based on the sovereignty of God the essence of its spiritual vitality.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

This study is based on the Everyman Edition of the Morte Darthur.

(E. P. Dutton and Co., July 1910.)

All references given in figures alone are to this work, and all quotations from Malory are taken from it. Its spelling of proper names has been followed, except in quotations from other writers.

Note: Cross-references within the dissertation itself are indicated as follows: Cf. p. 15.- Cf. chap. II.

Free use has been made of

The World's Cyclopedia of Expression

P. M. and J. L. Roget

(John B. Alden, 1883.)

The following works and articles have been read entire:

Arnold, Matthew: Tristram and Iseult.

(Poems by Matthew Arnold, Vol. I.

Macmillan and Co. London, 1869.)

Caxton, William: Original Preface to the Morte Darthur.

(Everyman Edition of the Morte Darthur.

E. P. Dutton and Co., July 1910.)

(This Preface is discussed in chapter II.)

The Encyclopaedia Britannica (the following articles):

Arthur (quoted in chapters II and XII.)
The Arthurian Cycle
Caxton, William (data for life of Caxton, chapter I.)
Grail, The Holy (quoted in chapter XI.)
Guenevere
Lancelot (quoted in chapter XI.)
Malory, Sir Thomas
Tristan or Tristram

(Eleventh Edition - 1910. University Press, Cambridge, Eng.)

Kittredge, George Lyman: Who Was Sir Thomas Malory?
(Ginn and Co. 1897.)
(Abstract in chapter I.)

Maynadier, Gustavus Howard: The Arthur of the English Poets.
(Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1907.)
(Repeatedly quoted.)

Morris, William: The Defence of Guenevere.
(London, 1904.)

Rhys, John: Preface to the Everyman Edition of the Morte Darthur.
(E. P. Dutton and Co., July 1910.)
(Referred to in chapter I.)

Swinburne, Algernon Charles: Tristram of Lyonesse.
(Tristram of Lyonesse, and other poems.
Chatto and Windus, London, 1882.)
(Quoted in chapter XII.)

Swinburne, Algernon Charles: The Tale of Balen.
(Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890.)

Tennyson, Alfred:
Idylls of the King (Repeatedly quoted.)
Sir Galahad (Quoted in chapter V.)
The Lady of Shalott
The Poetic and Dramatic Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson,
(Cambridge Edition.
Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1898.)

The following works (in addition to those above mentioned) have been consulted for data, chiefly for chapters I and II:

Baedeker, Karl: Belgium and Holland.
(Karl Baedeker, Leipsic, 1901.)

The Encyclopaedia Britannica (the following articles):
Knighthood and Chivalry (Repeatedly quoted)
French Literature (Quoted in chapter V.)
(Eleventh Edition, 1910.)

Goodyear, W. H.: Renaissance and Modern Art.
(The Macmillan Company, 1900.)

Green, John Richard: A Short History of the English People.
(New Edition - Thoroughly revised. A. L. Burt, N.Y.)
(Quoted: Heading for chapter I and in chapter I.)

Pancoast, Henry S.: An Introduction to English Literature.
(Henry Holt and Co., 1895.)
(Quoted in chapter I.)

ten Brink, Bernhard: Geschichte der Englischen Litteratur.
(Karl Trübner, Strassburg, 1877.)
(Quoted in chapter I.)

White, Rev. James: The Eighteen Christian Centuries.
(From the 2nd Edinburgh Edition.
D. Appleton and Company, 1868.)
(Quoted in chapter I.)

Brief quotations have been introduced from the following:

Carlyle, Thomas: Heroes and Hero-Worship.
(Illustrated Library Edition.
Colonial Press Co.
Boston and New York.)

Carlyle, Thomas: Sartor Resartus.
(Illustrated Library Edition.
Colonial Press Co.
Boston and New York.)

The English Bible: (Oxford Edition.)

von Logau, Friedrich: Retribution (Sinngedichte)
(as quoted in Bartlett's Familiar Quotations.
Little, Brown and Co., 1900.)

von Schiller, Friedrich:
(Gustav Fock, Leipsig)

A Standard Dictionary of the English Language.
(Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1900.)

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
1 1719 02377 0219

Usl Box Nbr: 28002213
KP Box Nbr: 28002213
Location Id: B -2A-01
Column Id: 01006137
File Descr: 11719023770
B
* 000

Boston University Libraries

Not to be removed
from the Library

GAYLORD